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Trusted Like the Fox

James Hadley Chase

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James Hadley Chase

Trusted Like The Fox

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PROLOGUE

He had everything ready: the soiled bandages, the knife, the dirty, tattered battledress, the damp mud to rub on his hands and feet. Most important of all, he had the identity papers of the dead David Ellis whose body was rotting out there in the sun.

But in spite of the perfection of the plan, Cushman was nervous. There were tiny sweat beads on his forehead, his heart thudded unevenly against his ribs and he had a disgusting taste of bile in his mouth.

He stood in the tiny, evil-smelling office and listened. If all went well, the identity of Edwin Cushman, the notorious renegade, would have ceased in a few minutes to exist, but before that happened Hirsch would have to be silenced. No easy task this, for Hirsch was as strong as a bull. There must be no bungling. A lightning stroke from behind was the only possible method of killing such a man.

Cushman glanced at the clock above the door. A second or so more and Hirsch would be here.

He waited, listening. His mouth was dry, his nerves jumpy. He felt that the threat of violent death could not be worse than these halting seconds.

The sound of boots crashing on the wooden boards of the passage outside made him stiffen. Then the office door jerked open and Hirsch came in. He was an enormous man, fat, powerful, built like a Japanese wrestler. His S.S. uniform clung to his great frame, hampering his muscles, and the seams of his jacket creaked with every movement he made.

"They'll be here in twenty minutes," he burst out, seeing Cushman. His close-cropped head shone with sweat. "Then—*kaput!*" He pushed past Cushman, went to the window and peered out at the ghastly wilderness of death that was Belsen.

Cushman fingered the knife which he held behind his back, edged towards the vast bulk before him. There was a sickening stench of stale sweat and filthy feet coming from Hirsch. As he jerked round, Cushman eyed him stolidly, kept his hand behind him.

"Well, Englishman, how do you like it now?" Hirsch sneered. "Too late to scuttle back to Berlin, eh? You thought you'd done well for yourself, didn't you? I'll see you don't escape. I'll tell them who you are. I hate traitors. They'll string you up far higher than me." His hard little eyes, red-flecked with terror, went to the window again, then back to Cushman. "You'll be lucky if your countrymen out there don't get you first. No one loves a traitor, Cushman. I wouldn't be in your place. . . ."

Cushman smiled thinly. He felt he could afford to smile. "Don't

call me a traitor," he said. There was a harsh jarring note in his voice that set a seal of identity upon it. You had only to hear it once and you would never forget it. It was a voice known to millions of British men and women who had listened to it during the five years of total war. It was an unusual voice, not very deep, very distinct, sneering, harsh. "At heart I am a better German than you," he went on. He had often rehearsed these words for such a moment as this. "It was my misfortune to be born British. I did what my conscience dictated, and if I had my time over again I would still do the same."

Hirsch made an impatient movement. "Keep that stuff for your judges," he said. "You have less than twenty minutes of freedom. Why don't you go out there and show yourself? They're waiting for you. They know the British are coming. Go out there. Let's see the colour of your guts. Your whip won't frighten them now."

"Don't be so melodramatic," Cushman said, moving closer. He stared up at the vast bulk before him. It was like David looking at Goliath. "Go out there yourself if you feel so brave."

Hirsch shivered, looked out of the window again.

It was Cushman's opportunity.

Fear and hate drove the stab.

They drove with such overwhelming power that Hirsch's gross body crashed like a felled tree. Cushman had picked a spot between the vast shoulder blades and the force of the stroke sent a jar up his arm. As Hirsch went down he upset a chair beside the desk. This clatter startled Cushman. He stepped back, jerking the broad blade of the knife from the slab of fat and muscle in which it had been buried. He stared at the dark blood that welled from the cut in Hirsch's shirt.

The gross mountain of flesh heaved itself up. Cushman selected his spot, struck again. The knife sank into the lung cavity. Hirsch made a feeble movement, caught hold of Cushman's wrist, but there was no strength in the thick fingers.

Cushman, cold and deliberate, pulled away, then struck again. Hirsch's lungs began to pump spurts of blood through his wounds. In his last writhing effort to get at Cushman, his legs beat frantically up and down: great tree trunks of legs that crashed noisily on the floor. Then suddenly the legs stopped thrashing. Hirsch glared up at Cushman, who spat in his face and, standing over him, sneering and triumphant, watched him die.

The sound of distant gunfire warned Cushman that there was no time to waste. He hurried to the door, turned the key. Then without giving Hirsch another glance, he threw off his S.S. uniform and stood naked before the mirror on the wall. He did not look at himself in the mirror. He was only too bitterly aware of his frail physique, the lack of muscles, the narrow chest and the coarse blond hair that covered his limbs. This was no body for a man of his courage, vision and ambition. But although his body might be puny there was nothing the matter with his brain. He had

every confidence in his mental alertness, his ingenuity, his clear-sightedness and shrewdness. It was ridiculous for a man of his abilities and mental equipment to have such a feeble body: as ridiculous as setting a priceless gem in a hoop of brass. But he had been over this argument so often before that he was sick of it. He had to make do with what nature had given him.

He spent a feverish five minutes smearing his feet, hands and body with mud; then he put on the tattered khaki battledress, not without a shudder. He had stripped it from a rotting corpse, and the horrible task of removing the fat white maggots from the seams of the garment still lived vividly in his memory.

As he moved to a cupboard in the far side of the room, his naked foot trod in the blood that dribbled out of Hirsch's wounds. It was warm and sticky. He started back, a tiny sound of horror escaping through his dry lips before he could control himself. Shuddering, he wiped the sole of his foot on Hirsch's sleeve, then opened the cupboard and took from it the soiled bandages and the identity papers. He glanced at the papers. They were as familiar to him as his own right hand. There was not one word written on those papers that he hadn't engraved on his mind.

Cushman had foreseen the end of Germany long before the other British renegades had even thought of the possibilities of defeat. The siege of Stalingrad had been to him the writing on the wall. There was time, of course, but the end was certain. Quietly and methodically he had begun his preparations for his future safety. He kept his own counsel, continued to work at the German Ministry of Propaganda, broadcasting his stupid poison to the British people who listened because they thought what he had to say was funny. He allowed the other Englishmen in Berlin to think he was undisturbed by the news that kept coming in of continuous German defeats, but all the time he watched and waited for the opportunity to put his plan into action.

It was only after the successful landing in Normandy by British, Canadian and American troops had begun that Cushman decided that the time was ripe. It was then that he suggested to his superiors that he should be allowed to undertake more active duties now that the final test of strength had come. Able-bodied men were at a premium; his reputation as a loyal servant was above reproach, and he was congratulated. In a few days he received a commission in the S.S. guards and was sent to the Concentration Camp at Belsen as Sub-Commandant. This was no chance appointment. Cushman had been pulling strings behind the scenes. Belsen was the first milestone of his road to safety.

The next move was to find a British soldier whose identity Cushman could assume. This took time and great patience, but eventually he selected David Ellis, a man with no relations, no ties and apparently no friends. More important still, Ellis was the only survivor of his battalion that had been carved to pieces at Dunkirk.

It was a simple matter for Cushman to extract all the informa-

tion he required from Ellis. Cushman was a master of torture, and Ellis, crazed with pain, talked freely. It was a simple matter, too, to alter the records: to give Ellis the identity of one of the many of Belsen's dead, and to hide Ellis's papers until the time came for Cushman to use them for himself. And, finally, it was also a simple matter to cut Ellis's throat as he lay raving in the dark.

The time had come. The British Army was only a mile or so from the gates of Belsen. Hirsch was dead. No one else in the camp knew Cushman was an Englishman. Cushman had already assumed half his disguise. He regarded himself in the mirror. The sallow-complexioned, blunt-featured face he saw reflected in the mirror irritated him. But for the eyes, it was the face of any Tom, Dick or Harry of the lower classes. But the eyes were good. They were the only true indication of his worth, he decided: steel-grey eyes, hard, alert, dangerous.

With a pang of regret, he cut off the small black moustache he had grown long ago when he had been a member of the British Union of Fascists.

The sound of gunfire was now ominously close. He took up the knife, wiped the blade, stared at himself in the mirror. He prided himself on his nerve and his cold ruthlessness; he did not hesitate. He opened the anatomical chart he had ready for the final step in his diguise. With his fountain pen he drew a line on his flesh from his right eye to his chin, following the diagram of the chart and carefully avoiding the facial artery. Then he picked up the knife once more and gritting his teeth, he dug the point of it into his flesh. He knew he must have a legitimate excuse for hiding his face under a mass of bandages. This was the only way, and he did not flinch.

The knife was unexpectedly sharp. Before he realized what he was doing, he had laid his cheek open to the bone. He could see the bone gleaming white, and his yellow molars, heavy with amalgam, through the scarlet lips of the wound. He dropped the knife and staggered forward. Blood gushed down his neck, the whole of his face became a mask of pain. He clung on to the desk; a black faintness crept over him like death.

Overhead a shell exploded and a small portion of the ceiling thudded on to the floor.

The noise brought Cushman back to his senses. Savagely he willed himself back to consciousness. He dragged himself upright, fumbled for the needle and thread. As if in a nightmare he stitched the lips of the wound together. It was only his willpower and the knowledge of his supreme danger that carried him through the operation. With trembling hands he swathed his face and head in the filthy bandages. He had practised bandaging himself until he could put the bandages on automatically without even looking in a mirror.

The pain in his face, the loss of blood, and the sound of gunfire shook his nerves, but he made no mistakes.

He poured petrol over Hirsch's great body half-hidden under the desk, put his own uniform and boots nearby. He splashed petrol over the walls and fittings. Then he straightened up, looked once more into the compound. No one would recognize this filthy object now. His face had disappeared under the blood-soaked bandages. His moustache had gone. His S.S. uniform had been replaced by the khaki battledress.

David Ellis was ready to welcome the liberators of Belsen. Edwin Cushman, renegade, was about to disappear for ever in a blazing pyre.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

MR. JUSTICE TUCKER began his summing-up on the third day of he trial. During the course of his direction to the jury he said: 'Now, what did this man, Inspector Hunt, say? He was a Detective-nspector and he said that he had known the prisoner since 1934; e had not spoken to him but he had listened to him making political peeches from time to time, and he said he knew his voice. He said hat on the 3rd September, 1939, he was stationed at Folkestone nd he was there till the 10th December, 1939. He said: 'I then eturned to London. While at Folkestone I listened to a broadcast. recognized the voice immediately as the prisoner's. . . .' "

The few members of the public who had succeeded in getting nto the packed court had spent the night on the stone steps of the Old Bailey. They had come to feast their eyes on the prisoner who ad, for so long, sneered at and taunted them over the German adio in what he had imagined to be perfect safety. Well, they had im now, and no legal arguments, nor the endless quotations from he hundreds of law books overflowing on the solicitor's table, vould save him.

The evidence given on the first day of the trial had revealed how asily he had walked into a trap:

"On the 28th May of this year in the evening, you were in ompany with a Lieutenant Perry in a wood in Germany, somewhere ear the Danish frontier at Flensberg?"

"I was."

"Were you both engaged in gathering wood to make a fire?"

"We were."

"Whilst you were engaged in doing that did you see anybody?"

"We came across a person who appeared to be walking in the voods."

"Who was it?"

"It was the prisoner."

"Did he do or say anything to you?"

"He indicated some fallen wood to us and said to us, 'Here are a ew more pieces.' "

"In what language did he speak first?"

"He spoke to us in French, and then afterwards in English."

"Did you recognize the voice?"

"I did."

"As what?"

"As that of the announcer or speaker on the German radio."

And now in his summing-up the Judge again referred to the risoner's voice.

A fat woman in a dusty black coat and a shapeless hat adorne with decaying feathers, sitting on the public bench, leaned forward grunted.

"As if anyone wouldn't recognize 'is voice," she whispered to a man in a shabby brown suit who was wedged against the wal next to her. "I'd know that voice anywhere. The times I've 'eard it 'Orl right,' I said to myself, time and again, 'talk as much as ye like. It don't make no difference. It don't upset me—you and ye silly lies,' I said. 'But you'll larf the other side of yer face wher we catch yer,' and that's wot 'e's doing now—larfing the othe side of 'is face."

The man to whom she was speaking shrank from her. He was a screwed up, bitter figure, below middle height, fair, with a yellow-white complexion. There was a livid scar running from his righ eye to his chin that interested the woman.

"Been in the wars yerself, 'aven't yer, matey?" she whispered "Cor luv me, yer poor face is a proper sight."

The man with the scar (who called himself David Ellis) nodded kept his eyes on the Judge who was talking now about British an American nationalities. How they had wrangled about that! Ther would be no question about *his* nationality if they ever caught him he thought bitterly. There'd be no backdoor for him if they eve tricked him into that dock.

"*I recognized the voice immediately as the prisoner's.*"

Well, he had thought of that. He wouldn't be caught as easil as the prisoner. He knew they would recognize his voice again i they ever heard it and he had taken precautions.

This Inspector chap had recognized the prisoner's voice. Th Captain of the Reconnnaissance Regiment had also recognized it— recognized it the moment he had heard it. What a mug the prisone had been to have spoken to the two officers. What had he bee thinking about? Asking for it, that's what it was, asking for it.

Well, he hadn't been such a fool. Of course the bandages ha helped, but then that was part of his plan. When they had finall taken them off he had kept his mouth shut, said nothing. The had been kind to him. Suffering from shock was what they called i Then when he came up for questioning, when he had to speak, h was prepared. It was amazing what a small pebble under the tongu could do to alter a voice. The thick, stumbling speech was all pa of the symptoms, they said, and they hadn't suspected him for moment. But he couldn't carry a pebble about in his mouth for th rest of his days. That worried him. The memory of the Britis public was long. One false move and he'd be where the prisone was now. It was so easy to forget that people knew your voice. Yo spoke suddenly, without thinking. You asked for a packet c cigarettes, for a newspaper, ordered a meal, and the next second yo found people looking at you, a puzzled expression in their eye and you realized that you'd forgotten to put the pebble in you mouth.

After he had been in London for two or three days, and suspected hat he had more than once betrayed himself by his voice, Ellis ecided he couldn't afford to take any more such risks. Until he ould think of a more permanent plan he posed as a deaf-mute; oing so far as to learn the deaf and dumb alphabet. But you ouldn't go around talking with your fingers to people who didn't now the signs. That might do for the few, but the pebble had to do or the majority. He would have to do something permanent about is voice, but what, he had no idea. He hadn't realized how easily is voice could betray him. He hadn't realized how sharp these eople were. Look at the prisoner. He had only said, "There are few more pieces here," and they had pounced on him; shot him, oo.

He had come to the trial prepared for trouble. Old Bailey was a on's den if ever there was one. The place was stiff with police and rmy Intelligence officers. He couldn't afford to make a slip here nd he kept the pebble tucked up between his gum and his cheek nd hadn't once taken it out.

The fat woman was speaking to him again. "All this fuss. Why on't they 'ave done with it? They know 'oo 'e is, don't they? That oice is enough. Why don't they get on with it?"

Ellis scowled at her, tried to shift away, but her fat body wedged im in and he couldn't move.

"'Ere 'ave a sandwich," she said generously. "They'll be at it all he afternoon. It's 'ungry work listening to all them words. Wot re they getting at, anyway? Think 'e'll wriggle out of it?"

Ellis shook his head, put out a grubby claw, took one of the andwiches. He had had no lunch and his insides were rumbling, ut he did not intend to miss one word of this legal battle. But for is own shrewdness this could easily have been his own trial. The tmosphere of the court, the words, the reactions of the speakers ascinated him. It was like attending one's own funeral service. He ccepted the sandwich gratefully, turned away to slip the pebble out f his mouth into his hand.

"That's right," the woman whispered, nodding and smiling. She ad a round, red, jolly face. Her small brown eyes twinkled. "Tuck n. I got plenty. I believe in feeding meself, not that you can get the ood these days. Queue . . . queue, all the time."

Ellis nodded. He wasn't going to open his mouth now, no matter hat she said to him. He bit into the fresh bread, chewed slowly. heese and pickles. The poor know how to look after themselves, e thought bitterly. Cheese and pickles while a man was waiting to ie.

The Judge was reading from the prisoner's statement, "*I take his opportunity of making a preliminary statement, concerning the notive which led me to come to Germany and to broadcast over the Jerman radio service. I was actuated not by the desire for personal ain, material or otherwise, but solely by political conviction.*"

Ellis winced as he heard these words. They bit unexpectedly into his conscience.

"*I was actuated not by the desire for personal gain . . .*"

He couldn't say that for himself. What he had done had been for personal gain. They could prove that all right, no matter what he said. But what else could you expect? In this country they never gave you a chance. You had to be a public school type or at least look presentable before you could earn more than ten pounds a week. Brains and ability didn't count. Never mind how hard you worked at night school to improve yourself. It was who's your father? What's your school? Let's look at your suit.

Before he had joined the British Union of Fascists he had been earning thirty-five shillings a week as a clerk in a tin-pot estate agent's office. He had tried to get a better job, but the white-collared swine, sitting smugly behind their desks, wouldn't look at him. The news that his father was doing a twenty-year stretch for killing his daughter always damned his chances. It wasn't *his* fault that his father was a reprieved murderer, was it? Anyway, if the old man hadn't killed her, he would have wrung her neck himself—the dirty little bitch! He had seen her with his own eyes walking up and down Piccadilly, a torch in her hand and an inviting smile for any man who'd look at her. And she had pretended she had a decent job in the ladies' room of a night club! No wonder she had money to burn. He had gone straight back home and told the old man, who'd gone after her. He could see the old man's face now: white as mutton fat and with something in his eyes that made him look like a wolf. He had tracked her to a smart flat in Old Burlington Street, and after throwing the swine who was with her downstairs, he had broken her back across a table. Serve the slut right! The Judge had been sorry for him; so had the jury, and the Home Secretary had reprieved him. But the story wouldn't die. "That's the fellow 'oo's father done murder—killed 'is daughter, 'e did. Blimey! I wouldn't put it past 'im to murder someone 'isself!" That's how they had talked until he had put on a black shirt, then they shut their mouths. They were scared of him then. They knew he could whistle up Scragger any time he wanted him, and Scragger would take care of them.

He wondered about Scragger as he sat in the stuffy court, his mind darting into the past with lightning feints of a trapped bird. Good old Scragger! Nobody scared Scragger. Perhaps he was a little cracked, but he'd do anything for anyone he liked, 'and he liked me,' Ellis thought. 'Seemed to take an immediate fancy to me. Maybe it was because he was so big and stupid and I was so damned puny and smart.'

His attention suddenly switched back to the Judge's voice. He was still reading the prisoner's statement.

"*I decided to leave the country, since I did not wish to play the part of a conscientious objector and since I supposed that in Germany I should have the opportunity to express and propagate views*

he expression of which would be forbidden in Britain during time f war. Realizing, however, that at this critical juncture I had de-lined to serve Britain, I drew the logical conclusion that I should ave no moral right to return to that country of my own free will nd that it would be best to apply for German citizenship and make ny permanent home in Germany. Nevertheless, it remained my ndeviating purpose to attempt as best I could to bring about a econciliation or at least an understanding between the two ountries."

Well, *he* didn't care about any understanding between Britain nd Germany. They could both go to hell for all he cared. Nor did e care how powerful Russia became or how many Jews were orn. All he cared about was looking after himself, making a bit of noney, having a home and some comfort. They paid him five ounds a week for wearing a black shirt. *They* recognized his vorth. He didn't mind working for the money. No one could call im lazy. He would have worked for anyone if they'd given him chance, but the B.U.F. were the only ones who hadn't thrown his ather's crime in his face. They treated him fairly. They had ncouraged him to study, taught him how to talk correctly, and hat was more than the damned capitalists had done.

But the war caught him on the hop. They had advised him to et out, to go to Germany, but somehow he didn't fancy going here. He'd heard too many stories about the Nazis. It was all very vell admiring them from a distance, but he wasn't such a mug as to et too close to them. In England you could stand up on your hind egs and call the Government all the names you could think of, and he Bobby, standing nearby, grinned at you from behind his hand. Vou could even bash a Communist—at least, he didn't do the ashing, Scragger did that—and get away with it. But in Nazi Ger-nany you kept your trap shut or else you got into trouble.

He didn't want to go into the Army either, but he hadn't the uts to be a conscientious objector. So into the Army he went: slap nto the hands of the capitalists again. Commission? Not likely! "The fella's father's a murderer, ol' man. George Cushman . . . ou remember? Murdered his daughter . . . shocking case. Couldn't ave a chap in the Mess whose father did a thing like that, could ve, ol' man?") No, they didn't give him a commission; they made im a potato basher, attached to the cookhouse. That was all they hought he was fit for: peeling potatoes every day until his hands vere raw and his nails broken. Then they sent him along with housands of sacks of potatoes to France, and he had been caught p in the Dunkirk retreat.

Maybe the newspapers had said that every man-jack in that etreating army had fought to the end. The Pioneer Corps, the ffice staffs, the cooks were supposed to have held the Germans back vith their bare fists. Perhaps they did, but he didn't. He'd had nough of the British Army. He had waited for the Germans and

then given himself up. "I'm a member of the British Union of Fascists," he had told them, and that did the trick.

Why should he care what sort of tripe they gave him to read into the microphone? He was getting a hundred marks a day and all found, and besides, it gave him a tremendous feeling of power to be able to talk to millions of his fellow-countrymen. Not every man could do that, especially if he was the son of a reprieved murderer.

"'Ave another sandwich," whispered the fat woman at his side. "The jury's going out in a minute. I've eaten all I want."

He took another sandwich, nodded his thanks. She wasn't a bad old stick, he thought. Give her a bit of a shake-up if she knew who he was. He smiled thinly, bit into the bread.

"Want feeding up, that's wot you want," the woman said after the Judge had disappeared through the door behind the bench. "Proper skeleton if you'll pardon me being personal. Was you a prisoner of war?"

Ellis hesitated, then gave way to the temptation to boast.

"Belsen," he mumbled, his mouth full, his eyes searching her fat, good-natured face. He was pleased to see her expression change to awe and horror.

"Cor luv me!" she exclaimed. "Belsen! I saw it on the pitchers. Was you there?"

He tore at the bread with his sharp little teeth, nodded.

"Well, I never," she said, seemingly unable to get over it. "Fancy you being there. You poor thing, you."

Ellis shrugged, looked away. Perhaps it was unwise to say too much to this woman. He looked round the court, wondered how long the jury would be before they made up their minds.

"Did they torture yer?" the woman asked, plucking at his sleeve.

He suddenly hated her morbid curiosity and turned on her. "Shut up," he snarled. "I'm not talking about it."

She looked disappointed, a little hurt. He could feel her eyes on him, but he looked straight in front of him.

The jury returned into court at four o'clock. They had taken twenty minutes to arrive at the verdict.

While Ellis waited he thought of the prisoner, tried to imagine how he would feel in his place. As the minutes passed he became more and more tense, until he had to make an effort to control his trembling limbs.

The door behind the bench opened and a small group of aldermen and sheriffs in their robes passed through, standing aside then to bow to the Judge who entered, carrying in his hand a pair of white gloves and that strip of black cloth known as the black cap.

The prisoner came up the stairs at the back of the dock. Ellis couldn't look at him. He felt it would be like looking into a mirror.

The Clerk of the Court asked: "Members of the jury, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

Ellis leaned forward, sweat beads on his forehead, his teeth ared.

"Guilty."

Twenty minutes to make up their minds to send a man to his eath. Twenty minutes! Ellis snarled at them, a red mist of rage fore his eyes. It could have so easily been him up there facing e Judge.

The fat woman, thinking he was unnerved, put her hand comrtingly on his arm.

The Judge pronounced the sentence of death.

"Serves 'im right," the woman said in a hushed voice, moved in ite of herself. " 'E was a traitor."

The Chaplain said, "Amen."

Ellis gritted his teeth. If they caught him, they'd hang him, too. ut he wasn't a traitor! They'd treated him badly, and he had got s own back; that's all it was. Besides, if they'd listened to him, ondon would never have been bombed. He had told them over nd over again to get rid of Churchill and to make friends with ermany. But the fools hadn't listened and now London was in ins, and they would call him a traitor.

He stood up as the court began to clear. He and the fat woman ere carried along in the crowd towards the exit.

Suddenly he could contain himself no longer. "It's murder!" he urst out furiously. "They never gave him a chance." He was so ngry that he didn't realize that he was speaking in his normal oice.

The fat woman stared at him, puzzled. Somewhere she had eard that voice before.

A policeman also heard the voice. He looked sharply round the ourt. The sea of faces moving towards the exit meant nothing to im, and yet he was sure that Edwin Cushman had spoken those ords.

While he stood hesitating, not knowing what he should do, the an in the shabby brown suit slipped through the doorway and oved quickly down the corridor, out of sight.

CHAPTER TWO

HE building was dark and cool after the fierce heat of the street; was silent, too, dirty and dilapidated. There was no lift, and the g sign on the wall on which were painted the various names of e firms housed in the building had more vacant spaces on it an names.

Ellis caught a glimpse of the girl's legs as she walked up the airs to the second floor. He was plodding up the first flight, and d heard her wooden heels clicking on the stone stairs before he w her. By leaning over the banister and staring up, he caught sight

of her legs in lisle stockings, the hem of her grey skirt and a flash of white underwear under the full skirt.

He quickened his pace, curious to see what the girl looked like. The two of them appeared to be alone in this big, silent building, and the only sound that came to him was the click of her wooden heels.

On the third-floor landing, he caught a glimpse of her as she rounded the bend in the corridor. She was wearing a grey flannel skirt and a short blue coat. Her little hat was shapeless: the kind of hat you'd expect to find in a dustbin. Although he only caught a glimpse of her he was immediately aware of her desperate poverty.

He hesitated as he looked at the directory sign on the wall.

The *Deaf and Dumb Friendship League* appeared to have offices round the bend of the corridor if you could believe the painted hand pointing in that direction. He walked on, rounded the bend as the girl disappeared through a doorway, half-way down the passage.

When Ellis reached this door, he found lettered on it in flaked black paint on pebbled glass: *The Deaf and Dumb Friendship League;* and in smaller letters the legend: Manager: H. Whitcombe. He turned the knob and went into a small narrow room with two windows, a shabby little typewriter desk, closed, a number of dusty filing cabinets, no curtains to the windows and a carpet so threadbare that you wouldn't notice the rips in it unless you tripped over one.

A counter divided the room into two, and in its turn the counter was divided by four wooden screens. They reminded Ellis of the partitions in the pledging office of a pawnbroker's shop.

The girl in the grey skirt was standing at one of the partitions, her back to Ellis. He stared at her, wishing to see her face, but as she did not look round, he had to be content to eye her square, narrow shoulders, her straight back and her legs which had already attracted his attention. Rather to his surprise he found himself trying to see beyond the shabby clothes at what he was sure was a beautifully proportioned body. Her legs vaguely excited him in spite of the darned lisle stockings and the down-at-the-heel shoes.

Except for the girl and Ellis the room was empty. He took up a position at the partition next to the one at which she was standing and waited. The partition hid the girl but he could see her hands resting on the ink-stained counter.

They were small, strong hands; brown and smooth; the fingers long, the thumbs waisted, the nails almond-shaped. He looked at his own hands, short-fingered, ugly, the nails bitten to the quicks, knuckles grimed, and he grimaced.

A door of the inner office across the far side of the room opened, and an elderly man came out. He wore a black suit with high lapels and too many buttons down the front. He had been fat at one time, but now he had wasted, and loose skin hung from his jowls giving him a look of a depressed bloodhound. His sharp, black eyes, under heavy eyebrows, darted to the right and left; shifty, suspicious

yes. He nodded first to the girl, then to Ellis. There was nothing riendly about the nod.

He went immediately to the girl.

"There's nothing for you," he said, obviously anxious to get rid f her. "Perhaps next week. It's no use coming like this day after ay. Jobs don't grow on trees."

"I can't wait until next week," the girl said. Her voice was flat, xpressionless, soft. "I haven't any money."

The elderly man, who Ellis guessed rightly to be Mr. Whitcombe, he manager, shrugged. It seemed he had heard that tale so often it ad come to mean nothing to him. "I can't help that," he said, npatiently. "There's nothing for you. I have a note of your name nd address. If I hear of anything I'll drop you a card."

"You keep saying that," the girl said in her toneless voice. "It's hree weeks now since I gave you the forty shillings. You must do omething for me. You said when you took the money you were ertain to fix me up in a few days."

Mr. Whitcombe's face changed colour. He looked furtively at llis, then back to the girl. "You be careful what you're saying," e returned, lowering his voice. "Forty shillings? I don't know hat you mean. What forty shillings?"

"You said you'd find me a job that didn't need a reference if gave you forty shillings," the girl said, her voice tight with motion. "It was a loan, you said, because you wanted to get straighened out. I gave it to you because I didn't have any references."

"You're day-dreaming," Mr. Whitcombe said, embarrassed. Wait a minute. Let me see what this gentleman wants. You really houldn't say such things before witnesses. I took no money from ou." He moved along the counter until he was opposite Ellis.

"What is it?" he asked, his uneasy eyes searching Ellis's face.

"I want work." Ellis spelt the letters out in deaf and dumb signs ith his fingers.

A look of relief came to Whitcombe's face. He had thought that llis might have overheard what the girl had said. His own fingers rang into activity. Fluently and swiftly they spelt out words, o fast for Ellis to follow.

"Slower," Ellis's fingers replied. "I am a beginner."

Mr. Whitcombe lifted his shoulders irritably, opened a drawer nder the counter, took out a form. He laid it before Ellis, then oved back to the girl.

While Ellis was reading the form, he heard the girl say, "If you an't give me a job, I want my money back."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mr. Whitcombe turned. "Why do you keep on about money? I wouldn't take oney from you."

"But you did," the girl protested, "and I want it back. I'll tell our people. You offered to find me a job without references . . ."

"Stop it," Mr. Whitcombe said, rapping the counter with his ony knuckles. "Who'd believe such a story? You're a thief, aren't

you? Just out of jail. Who'd believe you? Be off or I'll send for the police."

"I want my money back," the girl repeated, a catch in her voice. "I haven't a penny. Nothing. Don't you understand? I don't know what I'm going to do."

"I can't help that," Mr. Whitcombe said. "It's no good going on and on. Something may come in. But if you want me to help you, you mustn't say you lent me money. You mustn't tell lies, you know. It never gets anyone anywhere."

"I did lend you money," the girl said, suddenly angry. "You said it was a loan, but it wasn't. It was a bribe."

Mr. Whitcombe suddenly chuckled. He felt quite safe now he had convinced himself that Ellis couldn't overhear what was being said. "They wouldn't believe you, you little fool. No one would believe you. It's your word against mine. Be off with you! Do you think anyone wants to employ a deaf jailbird? Ask yourself. Think about it. Would you? Go away! and if you come here again making out I took money from you, I'll call a policeman."

Ellis saw the girl's hands clench into tight little fists. They beat softly on the counter, then disappeared.

He drew back as she turned to the door but he was too late to see her face. He watched her walk to the door, open it. Her narrow shoulders wilted, her shabby little hat was like a halo of despair.

The door closed.

Mr. Whitcombe grinned to himself, then moved along the counter once more to Ellis.

"Have you filled in the form?" he asked with his fingers.

'The filthy rat,' Ellis was thinking. 'That's what they did to me before I learned to take care of myself.' He had read the form and saw at once that he wouldn't get work here. The form stated that three personal references were required before an application was considered. He thought of the girl. If he told this old twister he couldn't supply references he would ask for money, and then do nothing for him. He was disappointed, furious, and he leaned over the counter, glaring at Mr. Whitcombe savagely.

"I heard, you swine," he said. "I heard everything."

He hit Mr. Whitcombe across his loose skinny face. The old man gave a choking cry, staggered, fell down behind the counter. Ellis didn't bother to see what had happened to him. He stepped to the door, opened it, glanced up and down the passage, then ran quickly down the stairs.

He knew he shouldn't have hit the old man, but the temptation had been too strong for him. He thought of the girl. It was a pity she couldn't have seen what had happened. It would have done her good. She had paid forty shillings and had got nothing for it except empty promises. He was surprised to find that he was sorry for the girl, that she interested him. It was an odd sensation. For many years now women had meant nothing to him, but this girl

ttracted him, and the fact that she had been exploited forged a ond between them.

As he descended the last flight of stairs, the full force of his redicament flashed through his mind. He had not, until now, dmitted to himself how much he had been relying on the *Deaf nd Dumb Friendship League* to get him a job. Their advertisement ad completely taken him in. Deaf and dumb people urgently eeded in many spheres of business, the advertisement had read. The Friendship League was in touch with all important business xecutives, and work was found for trained or untrained applicants fflicted by deafness or who were deaf and dumb. And they had eft an old twister like that in charge!

Ellis wanted a job. He had to get a job. His money was running ut, and he was afraid to open his mouth in public. A job for the eaf and dumb would have suited him. And now he had to start ll over again.

As he crossed the hall he saw the girl in the grey skirt walking lowly ahead of him. She pushed open the glass door and moved nto the street.

Still interested in her, he followed her. The Strand was crowded; he air stale and oppressive. He walked slowly, thinking, wondering vhat he was to do. Twelve shillings and tenpence! That was all he ad. Somehow he had got to get money. He thought of Scragger. Scragger would help him if he could find him, but where to look or him?

He saw the girl in the grey skirt turn down Villiers Street, and ecause he had nothing better to do and she was an individual in a rowd of strangers, he followed, his mind preoccupied, but his yes on her legs. You didn't often see such pretty legs, he thought. Most women's legs were ugly. He wondered who the girl was. A eaf jailbird, the old twister had called her, and yet he hadn't houted at her. Perhaps she could lip-read. It dawned on him that e could talk to her and she wouldn't know him by the sound f his voice. She would read the words as they formed on his lips nd not, of course, hear his voice. He found that idea vaguely leasing. A man couldn't go through life entirely alone. A woman vas useful. This girl hadn't any money, nor had he. She was a ailbird; he was a fugitive. They might make a pair. He frowned. Why was he wasting time thinking of such rubbish? There were nore important things to think about, but his eyes never left the irl as she moved through the crowds, alone, despairing.

A band was playing in the gardens by Charing Cross Underround. The music sounded gay, and a large crowd was sitting ound the bandstand.

The girl walked through the iron gateway into the gardens, noved slowly along the concrete path. Ellis followed her. He hought she was going to sit down, but she kept on, past the bandtand, her shoulders bowed, her atrocious little hat a joke in the right sunlight.

Eventually she did sit down after they had left the bandstand in the distance. She selected one of the free seats opposite the Savoy Hotel. She sat there, her hands in her lap, her eyes on the waiters who stood at the Savoy windows waiting for the first diners.

Ellis drew near, sat down a seat away from the girl. He studied her, felt a stab of disappointment. She was plain. Her pinched white face was ordinary; her brown hair limp and unwashed. Her eyes were deep-set and dark-ringed. She was, he guessed, about twenty years of age. Now he could see her properly he wondered angrily how she could have ever stirred him. Apart from her figure, she was nothing: just an ordinary shop girl, a clerk, any menial worker you see in the London streets without even being smart.

He looked away from her, soured and disappointed. 'Anyway,' he thought, 'I don't have to bother my head about women. I'm through with women.' Yet at the back of his mind he still hankered after a girl. The few days he had spent in London had been lonely. If this girl had been something to look at, he would have spoken to her, told her what he'd done to the old twister, perhaps made a friend of her. But as she was, he couldn't bring himself to bother with her.

The girl sat there for some time. She scarcely moved. Her eyes followed the early diners as they took their seats before the windows of the Savoy. She leaned forward, an intent expression on her face as she watched food being served.

Ellis forgot about her. He sat smoking and brooding, wondering what he was going to do, how he could find Scragger. He too sat in the sunshine for a long time, then decided to go back to his lodgings. As he half rose, he looked across at the girl, paused.

A well-dressed, elderly woman had sat down beside the girl and was reading an evening paper. By her side on the seat near the girl she had placed her handbag. As Ellis glanced across at the girl he saw she was opening the handbag. Her movements were gentle and sly. He saw her dip her hand into the bag, draw out several pound notes.

Ellis felt no reaction at all as he watched the girl lift the money out of the bag. He sat there limply, his eyes on the girl's hands, absorbed in what was going on, yet unmoved.

Suddenly the woman dropped her newspaper and grabbed the girl's wrist.

"You little thief!" she exclaimed, staring at the girl who shrank back, tried to pull away.

Ellis grunted, his heart began to beat unevenly. He knew then that his destiny was to be linked with this girl's; he knew that he would help her, and in return he would have a hold on her; a debt to be settled at his convenience. He got up, went over to the two, tapped the woman's arm.

"Let her go," he said.

The woman stared at his thin, scarred face, looked into his bleak eyes and abruptly let go of the girl. Then she put her hand to her face and began to scream.

Ellis grabbed hold of the girl's arm, dragged her to her feet.

"Come on," he snarled.

They began to run towards the Embankment.

CHAPTER THREE

SHE sat on the edge of his bed, weeping; the disreputable little hat still on her head. Her face was white and puffy, and her red-rimmed eyes glassy with tears.

Ellis stood by the window, looking through the dirty muslin curtains into the street below. There was a dryness in his mouth that irritated him, and his heart thudded unevenly. Now and then he glanced at the girl, but almost immediately his eyes shifted back to the street. He was waiting for a police car to pull up before the little grey house and for policemen to come tumbling out—after him.

"Shut up," he said to the girl. "Can't you stop snivelling?" But he wasn't looking at her, and she had no means of knowing that he was speaking to her. In her tomb of silence no sound reached her. Later, he learned to touch her before speaking so she could read the words as he formed them with his lips.

She continued to weep, her hands limply in her lap, her shabby little shoes turned in, her knees apart. From where he stood he could see the V of her naked thighs under the skirt, but he was unmoved. Her puffy white face under the awful hat revolted him, and he was regretting the mad impulse that had landed him with her.

"Can't you shut up?" he snarled. "Someone will hear you." Then furiously: "I was a fool to have brought you here!"

The words beat uselessly against her dead ear-drums. She neither stirred nor looked up. He suddenly remembered she couldn't hear his voice and he made a movement of exasperation. It was bad enough to have her here, to be witness of her hopeless misery, but to know she was shut away from all sound made her even more useless and repulsive to him.

He turned back to the window. While he waited for something to happen he reviewed the past hour and was appalled at the risks he had taken. Why had he done it? Why had he given way to this mad impulse? He had been lonely, had wanted a companion, so he had helped her, and now he was landed with a snivelling little bitch with less guts than a louse. If she had stolen the money and run off with him, not caring a damn, he could have forgiven her plainness, but this blubbering killed any desire he might have had for her company.

They had nearly been caught too. That copper had been quick. He had pounced on them as they were running like two frightened children along the Embankment. Ellis had gripped the policeman's sleeve, dropped on one knee and had the big man over on his back in a moment. The fall had been a heavy one, and the girl and Ellis had gained a fifty yard start. Cars had stopped. People had shouted at them. It would have been all up with them if Ellis hadn't pushed the girl on to a tram as it entered the tunnel leading to Kingsway. The conductor had been upstairs at the time and the lower deck of the tram empty. Although the policeman had shouted, the conductor hadn't heard him. The tram made a tremendous noise as it rattled and banged through the tunnel.

They got off the tram at Southampton Row, and had walked quickly through Russell Square into the back streets where Ellis had lodgings.

Neither of them spoke to each other. Both of them were too preoccupied by the fear of pursuit to separate. The girl walked like an automaton; she seemed on the point of collapse. People looked curiously at them, but Ellis kept on, feverishly anxious to get to his room, away from the staring eyes. His landlady, Mrs. Wheeler, was in the basement when they arrived and Ellis succeeded in getting the girl upstairs without anyone hearing or seeing them.

The girl had slumped down on the bed and had begun to weep. It seemed that she was never going to stop weeping.

In the street below a policeman sauntered past, paused to have a word with the postman collecting letters from the pillarbox opposite the little grey house. Ellis eyed the policeman, aware of a tight feeling in his chest. Would Whitcombe and the woman with the handbag go to the police? He thought they were certain to. Before long, probably already, his description would be in the hands of every flatfoot in London. He clenched his fists. If they caught him it wouldn't take them long to discover who he really was; then instead of a month's imprisonment they'd hang him.

The girl said suddenly in her toneless voice: "I'm hungry. Have you anything I could eat?"

Ellis reluctantly left the window and stood over her.

"Something to eat?" he said. "This is no time to talk about food."

She rolled over on her side, burying her head in her arms. "I'm so hungry," she wailed. "You don't know how hungry I am . . ."

"Pull yourself together," Ellis said furiously. "You've got to get out of here. I can't have you in this room." Then seeing she was lost in her own misery, he caught hold of her and jerked her up. His fingers circled her arm. "Come on. Pull yourself together," he repeated when he was sure she was looking at him.

She twisted away from him and folding her arms across her stomach she rocked herself to and fro while she sobbed hysterically. "I'm so hungry," she burst out. "I haven't had anything to eat for days."

He drew back exasperated.

"I don't care," he said, wanting to shout at her but controlling his voice with an effort. "You've got to get out of here."

She continued to sob hysterically. "I wouldn't have taken the money if I hadn't been so hungry," she moaned. "Please give me something to eat . . . anything. I can't go on. I can't stand it any longer."

He caught hold of her, dragging her to her feet.

"I haven't anything to eat here, you fool," he said savagely. "Now get out. You've got money. Get yourself something to eat, but don't bother me."

She looked wildly into his mean, hard eyes, then her face stiffened and she went limp. Ellis made no attempt to help her. He stood back and watched her fall heavily on to the threadbare carpet. Her hat fell off and her arms and legs sprawled like those of a sawdust doll that has been tossed into a corner.

He stood hesitating. He had been too close to hunger himself not to know that she wasn't faking. He knew he wouldn't be able to do anything with her until she had eaten, and cursing her under his breath he went to a cupboard, took from it a pair of grey flannel trousers and a worn sports coat. If he had to go it would be safer to put on something different to the suit he was now wearing. The police were quick. They might have his description on the streets by now.

He changed, looked at her in disgust once more and then left the room. For a moment he paused at the head of the stairs, then ran quickly down to the front door.

He walked stiffly along the street, his eyes watchful, the whole of his body screwed up for instant flight. The policeman was still sauntering along fifty yards or so ahead of him. Ellis crossed the street, walked into a café. The girl who served him with three meat pies, rolls and a jam tart seemed interested in his scar. He felt her eyes on his face, and he scowled at her, snatching the two paper bags from her and slamming down the money. She muttered something under her breath as she went to the till, and in her turn slammed down the change in front of him.

He turned away, hating her and stepped into the street again. The policeman was standing at the corner, looking in his direction. Ellis hesitated for a moment, then walked back to the little grey house, his shoulders hunched, his eyes on the still figure in blue.

As he opened the front door, he looked back over his shoulder. The girl who had served him in the café had come to the shop door and was watching him. He made an obscene gesture in her direction, opened the door and entered the house.

He could hear Mrs. Wheeler singing somewhere in the basement. Her reedy voice grated on his nerves. She was singing a hymn:

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

His mouth twisted bitterly as he mounted the stairs. *Let me hide myself in Thee.* He'd have to do something better than that if he was going to save his neck, he thought, pushing open the bedroom door and entering the room.

The girl still lay on her side, her head thrown back and her arms and legs sprawled out.

He stood over her, scowling. He could have ditched her so easily in the tram, he thought, but he had to behave like a lunatic and bring her here; now he was landed with her. He knew at the back of his mind that he had brought her here for a purpose. Maybe she was plain, but she was a woman, could be useful if handled the right way, and the fact that she was deaf made things safer for him. It hurt his pride to admit that he intended to keep her with him, but that was what he was going to do.

He drew back his foot and began to kick her. She moaned, tried to move away. The sharp nagging kicks jarred her, and finally she sat up, pushed his foot away with her hand.

When he was sure she wasn't going to flop again, he opened one of the paper bags and emptied the pies over her. They fell in her lap, on her head and one of them rolled near his foot. Out of sheer spiteful devilry, he stamped on the pie, hooked the mess off his instep and dropped it into her lap.

"Go on, eat it," he said, "if you're so hungry."

He turned away in disgust as she crammed the ruined pie into her mouth.

He had seen so many people behaving like wolves during his stay at Belsen that the novelty of torturing her fell a little flat. He walked once more to the window, looked out. He stood there until he remembered he still had the paper bag containing the jam tart in his hand. With a sudden vicious spurt of rage to think that he should have taken the trouble to have bought food for this snivelling creature he deliberately crushed the bag flat. He felt the jam ooze inside the bag and the flimsy pastry crumple. Disgusted, he threw the bag at the girl, hitting her in the face.

He turned back to the window, satisfied that he had shown her he was hard and ruthless. The sooner she realized that the better. At the end of the street he saw a yellow newspaper van arrive and he watched a bundle of evening papers being snatched from the van by the news-seller who had been waiting for the Final Night Edition.

He wanted to rush out and buy a paper, but he was afraid to show himself a second time in the street. He watched the news-seller hurrying along, tossing papers into doorways as he came. He crossed the street, and the girl who had served Ellis in the café came to the door and took a paper from him. She said something that made him laugh, and he was still grinning as he tossed a newspaper on to the steps of the little grey house.

Ellis turned quickly to the door, then paused. The girl was trying to eat the mess of jam and crumbs that stuck to the inside of the

bag. She looked up, her face half-hidden by the sticky bag and her eyes cringed when they met his.

He walked past her to the door, opened it and went into the passage. As he was about to descend the stairs he saw Mrs. Wheeler standing in the hall, the newspaper in her hand. Cursing her under his breath, he stepped back so she couldn't see him and watched her.

Mrs. Wheeler was a tall, gaunt woman with tired eyes and thin, greying hair. She held one spectacle lens between finger and thumb and peered through it at the print.

Ellis gave up. He returned to his room, kicked open the door, entered.

The girl had got to her feet and was now sitting on the edge of the bed. They looked at each other.

"Who are you?" he demanded roughly. "What's your name?"

"Grace Clark," she said, frightened. "Thank you for . . ."

"Oh shut up," he said viciously. "I wouldn't give you anything. Nothing! Only you were making a damned nuisance of yourself. What do you think you're going to do now?"

Her face creased tearfully. "I don't know."

"Where do you live?"

"Camden Town."

"You've just come out of prison, haven't you?"

She nodded miserably.

"Well, you better go back there." He walked over to the window, raging, then turned, met her eyes. "I was a fool to have helped you. Why did they send you to prison?"

"I had nothing. My father was killed . . ."

"Don't tell me a lot of slop. They put you away because you're a thief, didn't they?"

"I couldn't help it," she said, showing spirit. "I tried to get a job, but no one wants anyone deaf." She clenched her hands into fists. "I tried and tried, but it wasn't any use. I had to live."

"You're lying," he said. "You'd have got something . . . a pension or something. You can't fool me."

"I had run away from the W.A.A.F. They were after me. It was my father. He was ill. There was no one to look after him . . . so I deserted. Then the bomb fell . . ."

"All right, all right," Ellis broke in impatiently. "I told you I didn't want to listen to any hard-luck story. I have enough hard luck myself. So you're a thief, that's it, isn't it? A thief."

She got slowly and shakily to her feet.

"I'm going," she said, her lips trembling. "You can call me what you like . . ."

A tap sounded on the door.

Ellis sprang across the room, pushed the girl away from the door, motioning her to keep quiet. He opened the door a few inches.

Mrs. Wheeler was standing in the passage.

"Good evening," she said.

"What is it?" Ellis asked in the disguised voice he assumed when they talked together.

She smiled. Her eyes were bright and hard. "Seen the evening paper?"

He shook his head.

"Then you'd better," she said and pushed the newspaper at him. "It's in the stop press."

Ellis read the small paragraph, his heart thudding against his side. 'This is it,' he thought, 'now what am I going to do?'

There were only a few lines of print, but they were enough. The descriptions of the girl and himself were complete to the last detail. They had even got her name. The police were asking for information which would lead to their arrest for robbery.

Silently he handed the paper back.

"What of it?" he asked, scowling. "Why should it interest me?"

"That could be you," Mrs. Wheeler said, stabbing the descriptions with a long dirty finger. "Couldn't it?"

"You'd better be careful what you're saying," he returned. "People can get into trouble making a mistake like that."

"She's here, isn't she? I heard you two talking," Mrs. Wheeler said, smirking. "Well, it'll cost you seven pounds. That's what she stole, wasn't it? Come on, give me the money and get out. I'll keep my mouth shut."

Ellis snarled at her. "All right," he said, throwing the door open. "You think you're clever, don't you? Well, there she is. Look at her. There she is—the thief!"

Mrs. Wheeler eyed the girl with a hard smile. "Not much to look at, is she? But she suits you. You're no beauty either. Well, fork up the money and get off. I don't like having your type in the house."

The girl looked at Ellis, begging him to do something.

"Give her the money," Ellis said to her. "All of it and get out. She's got you where she wants you."

Mrs. Wheeler unwisely added: "and where I want you too, young man."

A cold, sick rage seized Ellis. He turned away. He heard Grace Clark open her handbag and then a murderous impulse to smash this old woman gripped him. He snatched up a gold-and-blue vase standing on the mantelpiece and turned. Mrs. Wheeler was reaching for the money. She looked up, her mouth opening to scream, but Ellis smashed the vase down on her head before she could make a sound. The vase shattered in his hand. The woman fell heavily, her face a mask of blood.

For one long second Ellis stood over her, staring down at her, then he ran to the door. Grace grabbed his arm.

"Don't leave her like that . . . you've hurt her," she said in her toneless voice, her eyes terrified.

Ellis rounded on her, paused. Movement in the street below attracted his attention. He looked out of the window. Coming

from the café, a newspaper in her hand, was the girl who had served him. With her was a policeman. The girl was pointing to the little grey house, her face alight with excitement. Even the policeman looked interested and was hurrying himself.

Ellis grabbed hold of the girl.

"Now we're both in the soup," he said, shaking her. "We're in this together. Understand? You and me . . . together. Come on. We're getting out of here."

He dragged her down the stairs, along the dark passage to the back door.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE scar of the self-inflicted wound that had saved Ellis at Belsen was now an accusing finger pointing him out to anyone who had read his description in the newspapers.

First it had been his voice, now it was the scar. He could see no way round the scar; it was even more dangerous than the betraying sound of his voice.

His one thought was to get away; to hide somewhere until his shaken nerves had time to recover and he could think of a way out.

The girl, Grace, and he had got away without difficulty from the little grey house. While the policeman was ringing at the front door they had slipped out the back way and had taken a taxi to King's Cross station; from there, the underground to Baker Street.

The taxi-driver had eyed Ellis's scar with morbid interest. Ellis knew he wasn't likely to forget the scar, and if he read the evening paper, he was certain to inform the police that he had driven a man and a girl answering to the descriptions of the wanted couple to King's Cross. Well, that didn't worry him. It was why he had taken the taxi to the terminus. He wanted the police to think he was travelling North.

He made Grace buy the tickets to Baker Street station, while he kept out of sight; and in the Inner Circle train he was careful to hold a handkerchief to his face like a man with toothache.

While the train rattled through the tunnels he tried to think of a plan. He knew he was leaving a trail behind him and the police couldn't be far off. He had to go somewhere where he could think. He must get out of London. There were too many policemen in London. You never knew from one minute to the next when they would pounce on you. His mind went back into the past, and he remembered the time when his mother was dying. He had been in the way, and his father had sent him to stay with an old woman who lived in Eastwood. For two months he had spent his days wandering in the fields, exploring the footpaths and playing solitary games in the woods. He had come to know the district well, and now as he sat huddled up in the train, his handkerchief to his face,

he decided that Eastwood would be an ideal place in which to hide until he had formulated a plan.

When they reached Baker Street station, he sent Grace once more to buy two single tickets to Eastwood.

The girl seemed in a kind of trance. He had only to tell her to do anything and she immediately obeyed. The dead expression in her eyes both irritated and puzzled him. He did not understand that the shock of seeing him hit Mrs. Wheeler had robbed her of will-power and strength. She was convinced that Mrs. Wheeler was dead and that if they were caught, she would be found guilty, and both of them would be hanged. The thought paralysed her mind, made her an automaton. But although Ellis terrified her, she had blind faith in him. She felt that if anyone could get her out of this ghastly mess he could do it, and so, until she had time to recover, she decided to stick to him.

As the train carried them through the outer suburbs of London, it dawned on Ellis too that he would have to stick to the girl. She was essential to him if he was to escape. No one would pick her out from the description in the newspaper. She was too ordinary, had no distinctive features. He put his hand to the scar. It was as if he had his name painted across his face. She would have to be his voice; she would have to conceal the betraying scar. He had been right to have helped her in the first place; had been right to have got her away from the woman with the handbag, given her food. Now she was in his debt; it was her turn to help him.

He told her so.

She stared at him, helpless and frightened, reading the words as they formed on his lips.

"You shouldn't have hit her like that," was all she could say. The picture of Mrs. Wheeler lying on the floor, blood running down the side of her face, dominated her thoughts. "Why did you do it?" she went on, wringing her hands. "You could have given her the money . . ."

Ellis shrugged impatiently, looked out of the window. He knew she was right, and knowing that he had been unable to control his vicious temper made him uneasy.

They were now rushing past green fields and he remembered the Taleham golf course, a station or so farther up the line, where he used to watch the players and hunt for balls in the small wood near the seventh fairway. He suddenly decided to go there for the night. They could sleep in the clubhouse, and with luck the girl could get herself a rig-out from the women's lockers.

This idea excited him; he leaned forward and tapped Grace on her knee. She started back, flushing.

He told her what he thought of doing.

"I'll get you clothes. Anyone will recognize you now, but in a new rig-out you wouldn't be noticed."

She wrung her hands in silence, her eyes imploring him to leave her alone.

"Pull yourself together," he said, scowling at her. "You're in this
p to the neck. We've got to stick together now. Do you under-
tand? We've got to stick together or we're sunk."

A few minutes later the train stopped at Taleham Halt, which
ed directly to the golf course.

"Come on," Ellis said, opening the carriage door, "and hurry."

He was aware of the danger of leaving the train at such a lonely
tation. They might easily be seen; their description recognized, but
e had to risk that. He felt that if they were lucky and no one spotted
hem getting off the train, then they'd be safe for at least a day or
o hidden somewhere on the golf course.

They walked quickly across the platform to the station exit.
There was no ticket collector at the gate. A notice asking passengers
o hand their tickets to the booking clerk caught Ellis's eye. A
olfer, a heavy brown golf bag crammed with clubs slung over his
houlder, was rapping impatiently at the little glass window of
he booking office. He eyed the waiting train anxiously.

The booking clerk was fumbling for a ticket. Ellis grabbed
Grace by her arm and bundled her past the ticket window into the
iny station yard. He expected someone to shout after them, but
othing happened. The clerk had been too preoccupied supplying
he golfer with a ticket to notice them.

Well, that was a bit of luck, Ellis thought. They hadn't been seen
nd they hadn't given up their tickets. The trail seemed well covered
ow.

They walked up the steep gravel incline leading to the clubhouse.
Ellis wondered if the place was shut for the night or whether any
f the members were still there. As they reached the top of the
ill, he saw the white squat building facing the eighteenth green. A
ght came through one of the uncurtained windows, but even as he
aw it the light suddenly went out.

He pushed Grace off the gravel path into the thicket. Startled,
he gave a little cry and struggled feebly, looking at him in terrified
nticipation.

Ellis sneered at her. "I'm not going to hurt you, you fool; some-
ne's coming."

They crouched down in the thicket and waited. After some
inutes a tall, beefy-looking man passed their hiding place. His cap
as at the back of his head and his broad fat face was red and shiny.
He whistled under his breath, and Ellis noticed that he carried an
vening paper under his arm.

When he had gone, Ellis and the girl approached the clubhouse.

"Stay here," he said to her, "and keep your eyes skinned. If you
e anyone, let me know at once. I'm going to try to get in." He
ook hold of her arm, pulled her close. "No tricks," he said, staring
t her intently. "You stay here and watch. You'll be sorry if you try
ny tricks."

He left her standing by a clump of bushes, screening her from

the lane, and walked cautiously round the building. He peered into the darkened rooms. There was no one in the building.

He tried the front and back doors, but both were securely locked, so he selected a convenient window, broke a pane of glass with a stone, put his hand through the opening and lifted the latch. He swung himself through the window and dropped to the floor.

Crossing the room, which appeared to be the Secretary's office, he opened the door and stepped into the passage leading to the front entrance.

There was a Yale lock on the front door and he opened the door without difficulty. He went quickly down the path to where he had left Grace. It came as a shock to him when he found she was no longer there.

He stood looking round, a cold light in his eyes, his mouth half open. She couldn't have gone far. It was unlikely that she had returned to the station. He looked at the sandy ground, saw her footprints. He judged from them that she had run off towards the little wood, half hidden by a line of bunkers, in which he had played so often as a child. Looking in that direction, he suddenly spotted her, a dark outline running blindly away from him.

He went after her. As he pounded across the close-cut grass of the fairway, a murderous fury swamped his reason. He wanted to get his hands on her, beat her, stamp her into the ground, make her bleed. He shouted once or twice, then remembering that she couldn't hear him, he saved his breath. He was surprised how quickly she moved. Most girls didn't know how to run, but this little fool seemed to have wings to her feet.

Before he had run more than a hundred yards, he was panting, and twice he stumbled. This sign of poor stamina increased his fury. He'd make her pay when he caught her, he snarled to himself; she'd be sorry she'd made a monkey out of *him!*

He kept on, his teeth gritted, his elbows close to his sides. It dawned on him that he might not catch her if he didn't put on a spurt, but although he made a desperate effort, he could not increase his speed.

Then suddenly she glanced back over her shoulder and saw him pounding along behind her. She threw up her hands, swerved, lost ground. He heard her thin wail of fear, and encouraged, he stretched his legs and somehow closed the distance between them. Now only twenty yards separated them, and he thought he had got her. The desire to close with her, to strike her, to teach her that he wasn't to be played with filled him with vicious anticipation, but she just managed to dodge his questing hands, swerve, and run on. Her feet now seemed scarcely to touch the ground, and with a feeling of frustrated fury, Ellis saw the distance between them once more lengthen.

Blood pounded in his head, breath whistled through his open mouth, his lungs seemed to be bursting. He couldn't see where he

as going, but he kept on, running blindly, furious, determined
catch her. Then suddenly he seemed to step into a void, and with
startled yell he plunged head first into a deep trench that had
een cut half-way across the fairway.

He hit the bottom of the trench with tremendous force, his legs
visting under him. The shock and violence of the fall stunned
m, and for a few moments he blacked out, then a sharp, sickening
ain in his right leg made him cry out. He caught his breath, tried
sit up, but the pain pounced on him again. Frightened, he lay
ill, sweat pouring off his face. He waited, trying to regain his
reath, horrified at the possibility of a serious injury. He stared at
is right leg. It was bent back at an awkward angle, and he knew
en that it was broken. Black despair seized him. It was all up
ith him now. He was finished—trapped like a snared rabbit, stuck
ere until they came for him. He cursed at the top of his voice, in
nglish and then in German. His face was dark with frustrated
ge and fear, his eyes wild, the veins in his neck like thick cords.
e pounded the sandy soil with his clenched fists, and then dug
s fingers into the ground until tiny particles of sand, wedged
nder his finger-nails, drew blood.

To be caught like this! To be pinned down in this damp trench
ntil someone stumbled across him. They'd find the broken
indow and they'd know he had done it. They'd send for the
olice and he'd be recognized. Then he'd be finished—*kaput!*

After a few moments he exhausted his rage, and gained control
himself. Sitting up, he gingerly touched his leg. It was painful
nd was already beginning to swell. In a little while, it would be
ad. The thought of lying in this trench all night, the pain getting
orse, flung him into a panic. He began to shout for help, not
ring now if they did catch him so long as he wasn't left alone in
e dark with the pain getting worse and the leg swelling as each
our crept past.

His shouts, dwarfed by the great stretch of open ground around
m, were snatched uselessly away into space by the rising wind.
o one heard him.

He took hold of his broken leg and tried to straighten it. The
oment he moved it pain bit into his body like the teeth of a savage
imal, making him cry out. He fell back against the side of the
ench, sick with pain and fear, and lay still, the sweat of exertion
owing cold on his face and neck, and the pain sucking away his
rength. He felt himself dragged down, helpless, through a
ld, silent darkness.

"Are you hurt?" Grace called down to him.

He heard her voice, and for a moment could not believe that
e had returned. He made a great effort to keep himself on the
ge of consciousness, and raising his head, he looked up. He saw
r; a small dark shape against the night sky, standing on the edge
the trench, peering down at him. The relief that he wasn't going
be left alone, that she was going to help him, was almost too

much for him. As she clambered into the trench he caught hold of her hands and pulled her down by his side.

"Don't leave me," he implored, too anxious to realize that in the darkness of the trench she could not read his lips. "I've broken my leg. You've got to help me. I gave you food. I saved you from that woman. You can't leave me here. They'll catch me." He clung to her hands. "If you don't help me I'll tell them it was you who killed Mrs. Wheeler."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE wind had stiffened and great swollen clouds came up from the west, blotting out the clear sky, the stars and the moon. A few minutes after ten o'clock it began to rain.

Lying in the trench, Ellis cursed the rain. It fell lightly at first, but as more clouds climbed the horizon it began to pour: sheet after sheet of grey, cold water, chased by the wind, soaking into the open ground.

He wished he hadn't let Grace go. Now it was raining she would probably stay under cover and leave him out in the open to get on as best he could. She had been calm and tender when she realized that his leg was broken. It was odd that she should have behaved like that, Ellis thought. Now that she had him at her mercy she seemed to lose her fear of him, and instead of jeering at him and leaving him as he would have done in her place, she had actually made him comfortable and had straightened his broken leg so efficiently that he had scarcely felt any pain.

"I'll go to the clubhouse," she had said. "Perhaps I can find something I can use as a splint."

He couldn't understand how a girl of her type knew anything about broken limbs, and when he asked her, she explained that she had been a nursing orderly in the W.A.A.F. and had passed a number of tests in first aid.

He didn't want her to go, but he knew something had to be done. He couldn't stay in the trench. Before long he would have to make an effort to climb the steep bank, and to crawl somehow or other to the wood. At the moment he was too frightened to move, but if she set the bone and strapped it up, he might be able to make the attempt.

So she had gone. He had listened to her speeding footfalls as she ran lightly across the grass, but when the sound of her running had died away, he immediately lost confidence and cursed himself for letting her go.

She wouldn't come back. After the way he had treated her, she would be a fool to come back. In her place he wouldn't have hesitated. It would have been a perfect opportunity to have ditched her. Ditched in a ditch, he thought, and thumped the moist soil, furious and fearful.

It was now cold and wet in the trench. Rain poured down on his ead, cold against his feverish skin. It would rain, he thought itterly: this ghastly country and its treacherous weather. You ever knew. He could have stood the pain and the worry if it had een dry and warm, but this insinuating wet and cold unnerved im.

Minutes ticked by. He had taken off his wrist-watch and stowed t in his wallet to protect it from the wet. Unable to resist looking t it, he brought it out once more and saw she had been away wenty minutes. Twenty minutes! What was she doing? Was she oming back? He tried to raise himself to look over the top of the rench but pain forced him to lie still. All he could see was the lark sullen sky overhead and feel the rain on his face.

A new sound came to him as he lay there. The sound of an pproaching train. It rattled along the track, slowed down, and inally stopped at the station. He immediately imagined the girl vaiting on the platform, getting into the train and settling in a orner seat. He could picture her white, anxious face as she peered hrough the window to make sure that no one had seen her. The rain began to move again. He imagined her being carried away rom him, and he clawed at the wet soil, trying to pull himself up, earful of being left on his own.

He heard a distant signal thump down as the train moved off. Somehow the sound reminded him of the noise the trap would nake when they hanged him. He shivered, his hand going to his hroat.

Then, just as he was about to give up hope, he heard her coming, nd saw a light flickering over the edge of the trench.

"Put it out, you fool!" he raved. Was the girl crazy to wave a ight like that for anyone to see? But, of course, she couldn't hear im, and when she climbed down into the trench, he knocked the orch violently out of her hand.

"It's all right," she said quietly, picking up the torch and kneeing in the wet beside him. "No one can see us. I had to have a light. t's dark and wet out there."

The torch lit up the trench, and he saw the sand, dark with rain, is twisted leg, his wet trousers, the girl also wet through, her hair ike rats' tails, the awful little hat wilting.

"I'll try and fix your leg," she said.

She had with her a big suit-case and two brightly-coloured olfing umbrellas. Although she was breathing hard, she was alm, and he felt more confident now she was with him.

"It would rain, wouldn't it?" she said as she opened one of the mbrellas. Unconsciously she had adopted the cheerful tone a urse has in a sickroom.

He nodded, watched her. She wasn't such a fool, he decided. He oubted if even he would have thought to look for an umbrella.

She fixed the big umbrella across the sides of the trench so that formed a roof over his head. It was a relief not to feel the rain,

and he nodded approvingly when she opened the second umbrella and set it up beside the first. The two umbrellas formed a gay and complete roof to the trench, shutting out the rain and making the trench almost cosy. It was now just the kind of place a child would have loved to have been shut up in; and lying there, the rain and the sullen sky blotted out, the light from the torch on the brilliant colours of the umbrellas, Ellis went back into his childhood, and for a moment or so was actually moved.

Grace was unpacking the suit-case. She produced two large mackintosh sheets which she spread on the wet soil.

"You'll have to move on to that," she said, "or you'll get rheumatism."

He pointed to his leg. "Fix my leg," he said impatiently. "Never mind about rheumatism. Do you think I want to stay here all night?"

But she was busy unpacking the suit-case and she wasn't looking at him so she did not know he was speaking. This threw him into another rage. (To be at the mercy of this deaf bitch, he raved.) He tried to touch her, but she was just beyond his reach and he was forced to lie still, hating her, waiting for her to turn.

"Can you help yourself?" she asked, coming to him and kneeling over him. He smelt the wet flannel of her skirt and drops of water fell from the stupid little flower in her hat on to his face.

He grabbed her arm, shook it. "My leg," he shouted. "Get on with it! Never mind about the wet. Fix my leg!"

But she couldn't have been watching his lips, for she said calmly: "Raise yourself. I'll steady your leg while you get on to the mackintosh."

He was going to argue, telling her he didn't give a damn about the damp, but he suddenly hadn't the strength. He hated to let her dominate him, but in his present condition it was so much easier to do what he was told.

He finally worked his way on to the mackintosh. She was remarkably efficient the way she handled his leg. Tenderly she held it just off the ground and she seemed to anticipate his movements so he managed to inch on to the mackintosh without great pain. But he was sweating by the time he was stretched on the sheet, and he felt he was going to be sick. She saw his deathly pallor and his glistening skin and she pressed him down, her small brown hand firm on his shoulder.

"I have some brandy here," she said, twisting round to the suit-case.

He stared at her narrow arched back as she bent over the suit-case, at her beautifully shaped legs. It was a pity she was so plain, he thought. She had a beautiful body. A tiny spark of lust rose up inside him, but sparked out immediately as he felt a twinge of pain.

She came over to him, a tumbler containing brandy in her hand.

"Drink this," she said, raising his head.

The brandy helped. He felt it going down inside him, spreading a comforting warmth, pushing away the deadly sickness, giving him courage.

She began to take off his shoes, and he suddenly wondered if his feet were clean. Hot shame ran through him: a feeling he hadn't experienced since a child. This feeling angered him, and he tried to stop her, only he couldn't reach her hands. So he lay still, staring up at the multi-coloured umbrellas, angry and ashamed, hating her unfairly, blaming her for his loss of pride. She took off his shoes and socks, and then she came closer and began to fumble at his trouser buttons.

He snatched at her hands, gripping her wrists and glaring at her.

"Leave me alone," he snarled. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

She stared back at him, her small white face scared and a puzzled look in her eyes.

"It's all right," she said soothingly. "I'm going to set your leg. I'll have to take your trousers off. It doesn't matter. . . . . I was a nurse once . . . at least, almost a nurse."

"Leave me alone," he muttered, furious to find that he was blushing. He thought of his thin hairy legs and shrank from her seeing them. "You're not to undress me."

But she persisted with a kindly, anxious obstinacy. It was too much of an effort to stop her, and when she pulled away from him, he hadn't the strength to hold on to her, and he lay still again, his eyes shut, his thin lips moving angrily. He let her remove his trousers, and he turned his face away.

But as she gently worked the trousers over his feet, she accidentally jarred him, sending pain shooting up his leg, making him cry out.

He called her an obscene name, but she did not know he had done so. He wanted to kick her, to make her suffer as he was suffering, but he was too afraid to make the necessary move in case he increased his own pain.

He raised his head and watched her, his eyes vicious. She had produced a blanket from the suit-case and was now covering his sound leg with it. The warmth from the blanket was comforting. She examined the broken leg in the light of the torch. Her smooth brown hand looked beautiful against his white hairy skin.

"It's just below the knee," she said. "I think I can set it." She looked up at him, her eyes large and anxious. "It'll hurt."

"Get on with it," he said, cringing in spite of himself. "Set it. I can stand pain. What do you think I am—soft?"

But before she even touched the broken place, he was sweating. As her hand hovered over the swollen limb he flinched, biting his lip, clenching his fists.

She seemed to sense his fear of pain, and she poured out more brandy and gave it to him.

"Try and bear it," she implored, knowing how difficult it could be. "You won't struggle, will you? I want to set it properly."

"Get on with it, you slut," he shouted, terrified. "Get on with it and stop drivelling."

Again she missed his savagery as she had turned to bend over the suit-case again. He longed to kick her slim buttocks, to inflict indignity on her, feeling ashamed of his own cowardice and trying to blame her for it.

She produced surgical splints and bandages from the suit-case. It seemed there was nothing she couldn't produce. The suit-case reminded Ellis of a conjurer's chest.

"There was a first aid box in the clubhouse," she explained. "They have everything. Even a stretcher. If there was someone to help me I could get you under cover."

"Oh, get on with it," he said, and closed his eyes.

He knew it would be painful, but he had no idea it could hurt as much as it did. For a second or so he lay still, feeling her hands on the broken limb. Then pain shot through his veins and was transmitted in waves through his whole body. Sourness drained from his mouth and in its place was the dry faintness, rising in his face and condensing on his forehead in sweat. He dug his fingers into the mackintosh, stiffened.

"It'll be all right," he heard her say. She sounded far away; then suddenly real pain—something he had never before experienced. It was too much. He cried out, tried to sit up, hitting out blindly. The pain went on, biting into him, searing at his nerves. Suddenly he felt the contents of his stomach rush into his mouth and he had a horrible feeling of being drowned. Sickness broke acidly in his mouth, but in spite of this he heard distinctly a sharp click as the fractured ends of the bone locked together.

For a minute or so he lost consciousness. The slipping away into darkness terrified him, and he clutched feebly at nothing, feeling himself sinking over the edge of a bottomless chasm. He cried out, and then plunged down and down.

Then later, when he struggled back out of the darkness, saw the light reflected on the coloured umbrellas, felt the dull ache of his leg and smelt his sickness and tasted it in his mouth, he cried out again like a child waking from a nightmare.

He felt a cold, firm hand in his. He clung to it and it gave him courage. She was talking to him, but he couldn't be bothered to listen to what she was saying. It was enough to know she was near him, that she hadn't gone out into the wind and the rain and left him alone.

She held his hand for a long time until he fell asleep.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS five o'clock in the morning it stopped raining, and the sun, pale behind the mist, came up from the east. The air was fresh, and a mild breeze sprang up, poking holes in the mist to reveal blue sky.

Ellis stirred uneasily, pulled the blanket up to his chin. The sunlight coming through the umbrella roof disturbed him, and he opened his eyes. For a long moment he didn't know where he was, what he was doing in this hole in the ground. His hand went to his leg and he flinched. There was an extraordinary lightness inside his head and his mouth was dry. As his brain awakened, he remembered what had happened the previous night and he half sat up, his heart thumping unevenly. When he saw Grace curled up near his feet, asleep, he relaxed, reassured. So she was still with him, he thought, relieved, and he studied her for the first time, regarding her as a woman whose destiny was to be linked with his and not as a dead nuisance who was to be used and discarded as soon as possible. He was surprised to see she had several unexpectedly good points. She wasn't as plain as he had first thought. He was aware, too, that he was seeing her at her very worst. No one could look much if hungry and dirty. She had on no make-up, her hair was tangled, her clothes awful, but now he took the trouble to study her he saw she had a well-shaped nose and chin, soft full lips. Of course, she was nobody—lacked breeding, but then he was nobody and lacked breeding, too. He knew that. They were a pair. He was a traitor, the son of a reprieved murderer. She was a thief, an ex-jailbird. A fine pair, he thought bitterly, his eyes leaving her face to probe her body. It vaguely excited him. She could be made into something, he thought. If she had money, if someone took her in hand she mightn't be half bad. Anyway, she had been unexpectedly useful. She had set his leg, and he was confident that she had made a good job of it. She had made him comfortable, and whenever he had awakened during the long night, she had been there to comfort him.

He moved restlessly. There was no point lying here thinking about her. She was here—to be used. Plans had to be made. He took out his watch. It was twenty minutes past five.

He reached out and touched her. She awoke instantly. Her eyes snapped open, and her head lifted from the suit-case which served as her pillow. There was no dull, vacant look on her face that most people have when they wake suddenly. She sat up abruptly, shivered.

"Come on," he said roughly. "We've got to get out of here. It's nearly half-past five."

She rubbed her eyes with the palms of her hands, stretched, scrambled to her feet.

"Does your leg hurt?" she asked as she lifted the umbrellas and closed them.

Sunshine streamed into the trench. It felt warm and good against Ellis's chilly skin.

"It's all right," he said, passed his hand across his face. The lightness inside his head worried him. He thought perhaps it was because he hadn't eaten for some time. Although he didn't feel like eating, he added, "I'm hungry."

She nodded. "I'll have to see what I can do. I'm hungry, too." She looked across the fairway towards the clubhouse. "I may find food there," she went on, half to herself. Then she picked up the blanket which she had wrapped round herself, shook it out, folded it and laid it down. "We shall need that. There'll be other things we'll need, too."

"We've got to get out of here," Ellis reminded her. "Help me up. I can't stay here all day."

But she wasn't looking at him so she didn't know he had spoken. He kicked at her in sudden exasperated rage but she was out of reach.

"I won't be long," she said and scrambled out of the trench.

"Come back," he shouted, alarmed at the matter-of-fact way she had left him. He tried to heave himself up, but she walked quickly away, too intent on the problems before her to worry about him.

For a moment or so he raged, cursing her and his leg in a futile flow of blasphemy, but then he realized the uselessness of anger. He was entirely in her hands. She was aware of the danger that threatened them, and she seemed confident. He would have to leave it to her.

He lay staring up at the white clouds as they drifted lazily above him. He had been used to fending for himself in the past and it was an odd experience to let someone else take over. He quite liked the experience, feeling heavy and apathetic, the pain in his leg dull, his strength sapped. If she made a mess of it, he thought drowsily, he would take over, but first, he would let her handle it and see what she made of it.

He dozed. His mind was disturbed by pain, his body listless. He felt feverish, and his tongue seemed too big for his mouth. He supposed he was running a temperature. It was not surprising. His clothes were still damp, and in spite of the mackintosh sheet and the umbrellas, the trench was soggy with wet sand.

Minutes ticked by but he was not aware of the passing time. It was odd how confident he was that the girl would save him or was it because he was so ill he couldn't reason clearly? He couldn't be bothered to work it out. All he wanted now was to lie still and doze, to imagine he was safe and not to think of the effort he would soon have to make to get out of the trench.

The hot sunshine, the sound of the breeze in the bushes lulled him. He slept uneasily, started up, slept again. Then he suddenly

ecame wide awake, his brain crawling with alarm, conscious that e had been alone some time. Feverishly he looked at his watch. It as now five minutes past six. Where was she? he wondered. Had e taken fright and deserted him? Had someone caught her in the ubhouse? He made a tremendous effort and stood up, his weight pported on his sound leg, the strapped broken limb pounding d aching in protest. Gritting his teeth, he clung to the side of the ench and looked down the straight fairway.

He could see the clubhouse in the far distance, and as he hung ere, sick with pain and worry, he saw the girl coming down the th and he caught his breath in a gasp of relief.

Well, he was up now. He'd hang on until she came. He felt that he once lay down he would never again get to his feet. His leg was hing, shooting a dull hot pain through his body. He felt the blood ound in his veins and a sick faintness hovering over him. But he ouldn't give in. He spread his arms on the ground in front of the ench, clutched at the wet short grass, waited grimly.

When she saw his head and shoulders protruding above the top the trench she broke into a staggering run. She had the suit-case ith her and he could see she had a cord twisted round her wrist d she seemed to be towing something behind her.

"But you shouldn't," she said breathlessly as she came up. "You ouldn't have stood up."

"Help me out," he said feverishly. "I can't stand much more of is. Give me your hand."

She bent down, gripped his wrist and pulled. Slowly he dragged imself out of the trench; the pain in his leg sent hot waves through is body. He cried out, cursing, sweat running down his face, his eth biting his lower lip, then he flopped on to the grass, panting. arkness came down on him, and he again felt himself hovering er the edge of consciousness. He tried to help himself as she lled him further across the grass but it was all too much of an fort. His leg hurt sharply, and he cursed again, then he sank down n to something soft and he relaxed, not caring what happened to im.

The firm cool hand that he had come to welcome lifted his head.

"It's all right," he heard her say. "Drink this. It'll do you good."

Tea!

He opened his eyes, stared up at her. Her face was close to his. er eyes looked big and anxious, her expression tense. She was lding a cup to his lips; the tea was sweet and strong.

He nodded, drank again. The tea cleaned his mouth, strengthened m. He emptied the cup, sighed, lay back.

"That was good," he said.

The darkness receded, and once more the hot bright sunshine mforted him. He found himself lying on a stretcher, a rolled anket under his head.

"I have food here," she said, "but we'd better get to the wood

first. I thought I could pull the stretcher along. I've brought a rope."

It was a brilliant idea, he thought. This girl was nobody's fool. If he had tried to crawl to the wood he might have done his leg a permanent injury. He had no thought of the struggle she would have to drag him to the wood, which was nearly a quarter of a mile away. That was her funeral, and he lay still watching her place the suit-case and the blanket on the foot of the stretcher.

Finally she was ready, and twisting the rope round her wrist, she turned and pulled. The stretcher didn't move. The girl's back arched, her feet dug into the soft soil. She strained, heaving against the rope, unable to make any headway at all.

He watched her, a feeling of vague excitement running through him. He longed for a whip. A cut across her legs would have got her moving, he thought savagely, and he shouted at her to get on.

She struggled grimly. He could see the veins in her arms standing out like blue worms; he could hear her laboured breathing. The foot of the stretcher lifted a few inches, but she couldn't pull it forward. For a minute or so she strained at the rope, the whole of her weight on it, then her foot slipped and she sprawled face down on the grass. He caught a glimpse of her white thighs as she rolled over, and he half sat up, his mouth working, his eyes feverish.

"Get on, get on," he shouted, waving his arms.

Without looking at him, without being aware that he was speaking, she scrambled to her feet and laid hold of the rope again. There was a wild, desperate expression in her eyes as she faced him. She dug her heels into the ground and heaved back. The stretcher slid over the ground for a foot or so, then stopped. She moved back, heaved again. Once more the stretcher moved, came to an abrupt stop.

"Pull, can't you?" Ellis muttered. "Get your weight into it."

Her face was set, her breath whistled in her dry throat. She strained on the rope, dragging the stretcher slowly over the uneven ground on to the fairway. Once there it began to move more easily and she turned, holding the rope over her shoulder, bowed down, and dragged the stretcher steadily towards the wood.

But it was still a desperate task. She staggered on, determined to reach the wood, her strength draining out of her. She began to sway to right and left as she went and Ellis cursed her as he was zigzagged about, but she was unaware of him. Nothing existed for her but the stretcher and her failing strength.

Ellis looked back. They had made progress. The trench was no longer in sight. The roof of the clubhouse was disappearing behind the gentle slope of the fairway, and as he looked, the roof disappeared altogether.

Grace suddenly dropped to the ground. She lay panting, her face shiny and white. For a moment she was done. Even Ellis could see that, and shrugging impatiently, he waited for her to recover.

After a few minutes, she sat up, ran her fingers through her angled hair.

"I'll have to rest," she said, trying to control her laboured reathing. "It's early still. I can't go on until I've had a rest." In pite of her exhaustion, she smiled at him. She looked quite pretty vhen she smiled, and seeing the change in her, Ellis was irritated. Ie liked to think of her as a poor thing, to sneer at her plainness. 'You're heavy," she said as if it was a joke.

"You're soft," Ellis snapped back. "You haven't any guts," but gain she missed his spitefulness as she was opening the suit-case nd was not looking at him.

She pulled out a package wrapped in a napkin, sat beside him.

"You must be hungry," she said, opening the napkin and handing im a sandwich. "The bread's a bit stale, but we can eat it."

Without looking to see if she had anything for herself, Ellis natched the sandwich from her and began tearing at it with his harp little teeth.

But the bread lay in his dry mouth, choking him, and his tomach cringed. He dropped the sandwich on the grass, tried o swallow what he had in his mouth, turned his head aside and ot rid of it. He lay back, disappointed and alarmed. He knew for ertain now that he was ill, and he looked anxiously at Grace to see f she realized just how ill he was.

She was watching him, a concerned look on her face.

"It's all right," he said angrily. "I'm feverish. I shouldn't eat," nd he stared past her at the wood, wondering if she were scheming o desert him.

"You'll be all right," she said doubtfully. "You're bound to ave a little fever, but it won't be anything."

That's all she knew about it, Ellis thought bitterly. He felt hot, nd he could feel the blood hammering inside his head.

"That was ham in the bread, wasn't it?" he asked for something o say. He was anxious not to let her know he was so light-headed. 'I haven't tasted ham for years."

"There was a tin of it in the refrigerator," she explained. "They lo themselves well here. They'll miss it."

He nodded, his eyes, feverish and bright, hardening. As soon s they found the place had been broken into, they'd send for the olice. The police would search for them—might easily find them. Ie looked towards the wood again. It seemed to him then to be he only safe place in the world for him.

"They'll come after us," he said uneasily.

She was eating a sandwich, and was looking across the fairway t the distant hills. There was an unexpected expression of peace n her face that angered Ellis.

He tapped her arm sharply.

"They'll come after us," he repeated when she looked at him.

"There's time," she returned. "We'll go on as soon as I've rested,

but they're not likely to come before nine. That gives us more than two hours."

"It's all very fine for you to talk," he exploded. "You're not crippled. You can talk about time. You can run if they come, but I can't; I'm stuck!"

"It'll be all right," she said quietly, soothingly. "We'll find somewhere to hide in the wood. I'm not going to run away."

That was really what he wanted to know. He would have liked to have asked her why she wasn't going to run away, but he thought it might not be safe. She might stop to think why she was staying with him, and realize that she had no reason to; that she could leave him now and make sure of getting away. If she couldn't see that he wasn't going to point it out to her.

"I'm not leaving you," she said suddenly, answering his unspoken question. She looked him straight in the face. "You helped me . . . gave me food. The least I can do is to help you now, although you haven't been very nice to me." She bit her lip, flushed. "But then I'm used to that," she added without bitterness. "No one has ever been kind to me. It's funny, but you've been nicer to me than anyone else I've known."

He thought of the squashed pie he had flung at her. He saw her sitting on the floor eating the broken jam tart from the sticky paper bag. '*You helped me. You've been nicer to me than anyone else I've known.*' All right, if she was such a fool to take that kind of treatment he'd give her some more of it.

"Well, get on," he said roughly. "I don't want to listen to a lot of slop. You've rested long enough. Get on!"

Meekly she picked up the rope, turned and began to drag the stretcher once more over the grass. Now that it was slightly downhill the stretcher moved more easily, but it was still desperately hard work.

But she went on and on, staggering sometimes, slipping, panting. The progress was sure. The wood came nearer and nearer until she reached the shade of the first line of trees. She flopped down, her head drooping, her lungs almost bursting. He could see she was utterly spent, so he said nothing. He stared at the wood with suspicious eyes, waited impatiently.

There was a thick, uneasy feeling in his stomach and the light airy faintness inside his head worried him. He was hot; his skin felt dry, and every now and then a shiver would run through him. He imagined himself spending days in the open, getting steadily worse until the girl, losing her nerve, went for help.

With fingers that trembled he took out a carton of Player's, lit one. When he inhaled the smoke, the trees and the sky seemed to get mixed up and spin before his eyes. He continued to smoke, not caring how he felt until the sour sickness rose in his mouth, forcing him to throw the cigarette away, and to lie still, fighting his queasy stomach.

Grace was on her feet now. She moved into the wood, but he was

eling too bad to care where she went. He shut his eyes and waited.

She seemed to be away a long time, and when she did come back he had to shake him gently before he opened his eyes.

He heard her say something but he couldn't understand what he was trying to tell him.

"I'm going to be ill," he muttered. "I've got a fever. Don't bother me with anything. You'll have to do it all yourself."

He felt the cool firm hand on his forehead.

"If you get a doctor we're sunk," he rambled on. "Do you understand? You've got to work this out yourself. I'd rather die than be caught."

"You won't die," she said. Her voice sounded as if she were in a long tunnel, she at one end, he at the other. "I won't let you die."

Ellis sneered wearily and closed his eyes.

PART TWO

CHAPTER SEVEN

"DON'T bother me with anything. You'll have to do it all yourself," Ellis had said, and Grace accepted the trust without hesitation.

There was something about Ellis that impressed her. She knew he was no ordinary man in spite of his mean, ratty face and his shabby clothes. His ruthlessness lifted him out of the common rut, and to her mind made him a member of the ruling class that always inspired her with awesome respect. His sudden collapse, his fear of pain, and his present helplessness had aroused her pity, and now she felt she couldn't possibly desert him. She was in his debt, she told herself: he had helped her; it was her turn to help him. She knew that he would have shown her no mercy had their positions been reversed, but that didn't matter. She wouldn't have expected any other treatment. She had said truthfully that no one had ever been kind to her. In that bitter sentence she had summed up the story of her past life.

Ever since she could remember, Grace had been unwanted. Her mother, Lucy, married at the age of seventeen to a man twenty years her senior, had been wild and undisciplined. She was attractive and without morals and had a weakness for men. She married George Clark, a dour, narrow-minded railway signalman, when she discovered that she was pregnant. The father of the unborn child could have been any one of the dozen young men with whom she had been associating. She hoped that George Clark would be deceived into thinking the child was his, but Clark was not quite such a simpleton. He provided a home for the child, Grace, when she was born, but he made certain that his wife should not forget that she was a 'fallen woman,' and consequently Lucy could scarcely bear the sight of the child, who spent an unhappy, unloved and lonely existence.

Ten years later, Lucy, sick of Clark's continual accusations, went off with a prosperous bookmaker. Enraged, Clark vented his hatred on Grace. She was then a skinny, white-faced little girl of ten and she ran the small house as best she could, went to the local Council school and lived in terror of her foster-father, who flogged her with his razor strop regularly once a week to impress on her her mother's wickedness.

At the age of sixteen Grace got a job as a typist in a printer's shop not far from her home. Although the beatings had ceased when she reached the age of fifteen, her fear of her foster-father remained. She was not allowed out after eight o'clock at night, never allowed any boy friends, and somehow did not make friends with other girls.

At eighteen she was earning two pounds a week as a shorthand-typist to the local accountant, but when the war came she threw up her job and without consulting her foster-father, joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as a nursing orderly.

Oddly enough, this independent action delighted Clark, who was a keen member of the Home Guard and at that time obsessed with the spirit of patriotism. He suddenly became proud of his daughter, and Grace, longing for any kind of affection, forgot her past fears of him.

When she came home on leave, Clark took her everywhere, introducing her to his friends, showing her off in her uniform and boasting proudly that she had run away to join up.

"A chip of the old block," he would say, grinning from ear to ear. "Just wot I'd 've done. Used to wallop 'er backside for 'er when she was a kid, and look at 'er now. She's a real good girl, and I'm proud of 'er. It just shows you, don't it? Look at 'er mother! Bad blood don't count if you bring 'em up right, and that's wot I done."

Then without warning, Clark had a heart attack, and the doctor warned him that the next attack would probably be fatal. This death sentence was too much for Clark, and he became morose and fearful. He sent a long, hysterical letter to Grace, ordering her home. She was granted seven days' compassionate leave and found Clark in bed, almost afraid to breathe.

Grace had an inspired talent for nursing, and she immediately set about making Clark comfortable, reassuring him and fussing over him. She ran the house, did the shopping and eked out his meagre savings with careful economy.

At the end of the seven days, Clark would not hear of her returning to her Station. A request for an extension of leave was refused. Nursing orderlies were at a premium and Clark was not considered to be in any immediate danger. But he could not bear to be left on his own, and forced Grace to desert. He hid her in the house so cunningly that when the Service police called they failed to find her.

This situation terrified Grace, and when she tried to persuade Clark to let her give herself up, he forgot his illness and resorted to the razor strop again.

Unable to go out, or even show herself at the windows, Grace spent three anxious weeks with Clark, who made her do everything for him, not lifting a hand to help himself. His fear of death turned to soured bitterness, and he again vented his hatred of his wife on Grace.

Then one night, during an air raid, a bomb scored a direct hit on the house, killing Clark and blowing Grace across the street. She recovered in hospital, her ear-drums broken, and the unfriendly world in which she had lived for nineteen years shrouded in an impenetrable silence.

There had been a number of casualties in the street, and realiz-

ing her position, Grace pretended she had lost her memory and did not know who she was.

She was sent to a home where she learned to lip read, while the authorities endeavoured to find out her name and her background. As soon as she was well enough and had mastered lip-reading sufficiently well, Grace ran away from the home, frightened that they would find out she was a deserter.

Hunger drove her to steal. She was arrested, tried as a first offender, put on probation while inquiries were made about her. Again she ran away, and again hunger drove her to steal. Arrested once more, she came up before a tired and irritable magistrate who promptly sent her to prison.

Released after serving her sentence, she had registered with the *Deaf and Dumb Friendship League* but had received no help from them, and had it not been for Ellis she would now be in prison again.

She did not allow herself to think of the future. Ellis was helpless; scarcely conscious. Her responsibility was heavy. She had to find somewhere for them to hide, a place not likely to be discovered by the police when they came to look for them.

She bent over Ellis, touched his face. His skin was dry and hot, and he muttered uneasily, moved his head away.

Carefully she went through his pockets, hoping to find out who he was. His identity card told her that his name was David Ellis and that he lived in Russell Court Mews. Apart from the identity card he had no other papers on him, and only nine shillings and sixpence in his trousers pocket.

As she handled his clothes she found they were wet; even his soiled shirt felt damp when she touched it. She stood up, frowned across the fairway while she thought. She'd have to get him out of those wet things, otherwise he'd get pneumonia. She became aware that her own skirt and coat were damp and the thought of getting ill herself alarmed her.

She would have to return to the clubhouse and get a change of clothes for them both. With difficulty she dragged the stretcher further into the wood and tied her handkerchief to a nearby tree marking the place where she left him in case there was an emergency and she had to find him again quickly.

She touched his arm. "I'm going to the clubhouse. I shan't be long"; but he didn't appear to understand what she said.

"I'd rather die than be caught," he mumbled. "You're not to send for a doctor."

"You won't die," she repeated again, wishing she was as confident as she tried to sound.

She took his watch out of his wallet, saw it was a quarter to eight. She'd have to hurry, although she was pretty sure that no one would appear on the course until after nine.

Golf is a rich man's game, she reasoned, and rich men don't get up and play golf as early as this.

All the same, she hurried down the fairway, keeping a sharp look-out for any sign of life, but she saw no one, and arrived at the clubhouse a little breathless but calm.

She went in through the front door, which she had left on the latch, and made her way to the ladies' room at the far end of the passage.

Cautiously she pushed open the door, glanced in. The room was small and dark. Around the walls were wooden lockers, and a row of wash-hand basins stood in the centre of the room. She entered, closed the door.

She stared at herself in the long mirror above the basins, pulled a little face. She looked dirty and dishevelled, her hair was knotted and hung limply each side of her white face. She stripped off her coat and blouse and ran water into a basin.

The water was cold but refreshing, and she felt better after she had rubbed her skin red with the towel she found hanging on a hook behind the door. She took a comb from her bag and did her hair, pulling at the tangle impatiently, hurting herself.

It was a hurried toilet, but she had no time to spare. She was longing for a cup of tea, and when she had finished doing her hair, she ran down the passage into the kitchen and put on the kettle.

She returned to the ladies' room armed with a long screwdriver she had found in the kitchen. She broke open a locker, found nothing in it except a bag of clubs, broke open another. Before she found what she wanted, she had broken open more than a dozen of the lockers, and time was passing.

She feverishly slipped out of her wet skirt, put on a light tweed skirt she had found in one of the lockers. A wool sweater, a weather-proof jerkin and a dark blue beret completed her change of clothes. After further delay she found a pair of nail-studded shoes that fitted her, and then she stepped to the mirror to study the completed effect.

Yes, she looked better, almost attractive. She smiled at herself, excited with the new clothes, and with her changed appearance. She rolled up her old clothes and took them with her to the kitchen, where she found the kettle boiling.

She made tea, cut herself several slices of bread and butter, and while she was eating she collected together the remaining food she found in the refrigerator.

The tea revived her spirits, and she felt that the position wasn't after all so desperate as she had at first thought. Perhaps the police wouldn't come, and if they did, they might not think of looking for them on the course.

Now she would have to get Ellis some clothes, and leaving the kitchen she went along the passage to the men's room.

This room was much bigger than the women's room. Lockers took up nearly all the available space, and once more Grace began to attack the narrow wooden doors with her screw-driver.

She was fortunate to find a sweater and a pair of flannel trousers

in the first locker, and a leather jerkin in the next. The third provided a pair of shoes she thought might fit Ellis, and also two pairs of socks.

She gathered these articles into a bundle, wished she could find an overcoat. She paused to look round the room; her heart gave a great bound, stopped beating for one agonized second, and then fluttered against her ribs so quickly she could scarcely breathe.

Sitting on a straight-backed wooden chair at the far end of the room was a young man in a canary-coloured sweater, immaculate flannel trousers, and a pale yellow shirt. His straw-coloured hair was thick and neat and shone like honey. His rather fleshy but distinctly handsome face was heavily sunburned. In his long thick fingers he held a mashie-niblick and he looked at Grace with the most startling green eyes she had ever seen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GRACE stood staring stupidly at the young man, unable to move, like a rabbit facing a stoat.

"I don't think the Secretary likes ladies to come into this room," the young man said and smiled. He had a pleasant, rather charming smile but Grace was too frightened to appreciate it. "And I'm sure he'll have a fit when he sees the damage you're doing."

Still she had nothing to say.

"I'm sorry to have given you such a shock," the young man went on. He lifted the golf club, eyed its glistening steel head, turned it slowly between his fingers. "You gave me a bit of a shock, too." He glanced swiftly at her. "I don't remember seeing you here before. Are you a new member?"

Her one thought now was for Ellis. She had walked into a trap, but Ellis mustn't suffer for her stupidity. What would happen to him when they took her away? she asked herself. "I'd rather die than be caught," he had said, and she felt he had meant it. But she couldn't let them take her away knowing that he was out there in the wood, ill, almost unconscious and alone.

There was no one else in the clubhouse except this man. If she could trick him into letting her go then everything might still be all right, but how was she to do it? He seemed harmless enough; puzzled, rather interested, but harmless. It would be useless to try to run away. He would be able to run much faster than she, and he looked powerful. Even the desperate idea of knocking him over the head went through her mind, but she knew it was no use trying that sort of thing with a man like this.

"No," she said, "I'm not a member."

"I thought not," the young man said. "I believe you've got hold of Whitworth's trousers. Of all the members of this dreary club Whitworth is the most fussy. Of course, you wouldn't know that,

but you shouldn't really take them. He'll never let us hear the end of it. Wouldn't it be a good idea if you put them back?"

"I want them," she said sullenly; a desperate, obstinate expression coming into her eyes.

"But so does poor Whitworth," the young man returned, smiling. "Without his trousers he'd be demoralized." He eyed her over thoughtfully. "And I do believe you have on Chrissy Taylor's skirt. My dear girl, haven't you any tact? Chrissy will be furious. She's the type who threatens people with a horse-whip." He laid down the club and stood up. "I must say this is all rather intriguing. I suppose you won't introduce yourself?"

Grace backed away, said nothing.

"I wish you wouldn't be afraid of me," the young man went on. "There's nothing to be afraid of. I'm absolutely harmless. I suppose you're in trouble. You know, it's rather a silly idea to pinch other people's clothes. They don't like it, and there's always the police." He smiled encouragingly. "I don't like the police myself, but they're bound to be called in if you do anything foolish." Although he was standing now, and looked very tall (Grace thought he must be a couple of inches over six foot), he was careful to make no move towards her. He looked at the leather jerkin, the trousers and sweater and the pair of shoes she held in her hands. "Have you a companion?" he asked casually, but his green eyes were now alert. He leaned forward to pick up the club again.

She didn't say anything.

There was a long pause while he seemed to be thinking what he had best do. Grace watched him, ready to run if he came near her, her heart thumping, sick terror making thought impossible.

"I suppose you have," he said at last, answering his own question. "Where is he?"

"There's no one," Grace said stubbornly. "I want to sell them."

"Then be a good girl and put them back. I'll give you some money if you're so hard up. Now do be sensible and put them back."

She stared at him, scarcely believing that she had read the correct words as his lips formed them.

"Go on, put them back," he urged. "You have no idea what a fuss there'll be if you don't. I'll give you the money. There's no point in getting into trouble with the police."

She wanted to give up the clothes, but remembering Ellis's wet suit, she knew she must keep them. He had to have a change or he'd get pneumonia, she told herself.

"Leave me alone," she said wildly. "I'm not doing you any harm. Why can't you mind your own business?"

The young man frowned, pursed his lips. His face reddened and he looked embarrassed.

"Well, I suppose you're right. Quite frankly, I don't care what you do. I'm not public-spirited. I don't care much what happens to other people's property, nor my own for that matter, but for

your sake I'd advise you to put that stuff back." He eyed her, then abruptly shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, well, please yourself. I'm not going to interfere. You mustn't underestimate the police. They're bound to catch you in the end, you know." He took out a bunch of keys from his trousers pocket, fitted one into the locker near him, opened it, took from it a bag of clubs. "Well, I'm off," he went on. "If I were you, I'd leave that stuff and be off, too." He slung the bag over his shoulder, moved towards her.

Grace backed away but he made no attempt to get nearer to her than it took him to reach the door.

"The Secretary comes at nine o'clock," he said as he opened the door. "I'd be off before then. If they ask me about this I won't know anything. Do you understand?" He looked at her, smiled "Good-bye." He went out of the locker room and closed the door behind him.

Grace stood motionless, not believing that he had gone further than the other side of the door. She felt a desperate sense of frustration not to be able to hear his receding footsteps. She waited, clutching the bundle of clothes, her heart slowly resuming its normal beat.

Then she saw him again through the window. He was strolling towards the first tee, one hand in his pocket, a faintly bored, disinterested expression on his face.

She watched him select a ball, tee up, and then draw a wooden club from the bag.

He stepped up to the ball, touched the ground behind it with the club, then swung. It was an effortless performance; the club head striking the ball squarely. The ball flew away, curving slightly to the left, then straightening. Grace watched the little white sphere, sharply outlined against the blue sky. It seemed to go on and on, until it dipped sharply, fell to the ground, ran some distance before it stopped in the middle of the fairway, a few yards from the green.

The young man dropped his driver into the bag and strode after the ball. He didn't look back at the clubhouse, and walked in the opposite direction to the wood in which she had left Ellis. She didn't move until he had reached the green, chipped up to the pin and sunk the ball with a short curly putt.

Then as he walked down a dip to the second tee, she rushed blindly from the room, seized the bundle of food she had left on the kitchen table, and ran to the door.

A moment or so later she was pounding down the fairway in the direction of the wood. She had not run more than twenty yards before she caught sight of her white handkerchief tied to the tree. She wondered if the young man had noticed it (thought that he must have), and if he had guessed what it meant.

She was so worried and frightened that she had ruined their chances of escape that she did not puzzle over the young man's

strange behaviour. At the moment it was enough to have a respite, to have got out of a seemingly hopeless position so easily.

She reached the wood, dumped the bundles on the grass, ran to Ellis.

He looked up at her with blank eyes.

"It's all right," she said breathlessly. "I have got you some clothes. How do you feel?"

His lips formed words that she could not read. He was speaking to her in German, his mind wandering.

She stared at his moving lips, bewildered.

"I don't understand," she said, kneeling beside him. "What is it you're trying to say?"

He frowned, closed his eyes, lay there limp, motionless.

She was aware of the passing time. A glance at his watch told her it was now nearly half-past eight. She must hurry. If she couldn't find a hiding place in half an hour they would be caught.

She rose quickly to her feet, untied the handkerchief, and giving Ellis one more worried glance, walked into the wood. The trees grew close, and brambles, ferns and shrubs afforded plenty of cover. The undergrowth was so thick that she was forced to keep to the well-worn path leading into the wood.

She walked for several minutes before she came upon a clearing. Here she paused, looking round. Two big tree trunks lay side by side, their roots withered and rotting, their branches dead. She immediately saw the possibilities of a hiding place here, and ran over to the trees, excited and a little breathless.

There was a space of about four feet between the trees, and it was already covered by a tangle of branches. Kneeling down, she peered up the narrow tunnel formed by the trunks and roofed by the undergrowth. It seemed fairly roomy, and with some hesitation she began to worm her way inside. It was dirty; dry leaves, bits of broken twigs fell on her back as she crawled forward, but it was dry. Working with her bare hands, she began to enlarge the tunnel, gathering up the dry leaves, breaking off the rotten branches. She knew that this was the best hiding place she would find in the time she had available. Later she would make other plans, but for her immediate purpose it was good enough.

She crawled out into the sunlight again, stood up and dusted herself down. She was dirty again, but the jerkin and skirt were not like her own cheap clothes, and most of the dust brushed off.

She returned to Ellis and began to drag the stretcher along the narrow path leading to the clearing.

It was again a desperate struggle, but she kept on, sometimes falling, but getting up again, refusing to be beaten. Finally, not quite knowing how she had done it, she reached the clearing. She collapsed on the ground and sobbed with relief; the muscles in her arms and legs aching, her bones feeling as if they had been pulled from their sockets. It took her several minutes to screw

up enough strength to complete her task, but she did manage to drag the stretcher into the tunnel before collapsing again.

She had no idea how long she lay in the darkness beside Ellis, but it was some time. Finally she aroused herself, sat up and turned on the electric torch.

The light revealed leaves, moss and ferns, growing so thickly that they formed a complete roof over their heads, the rough sides of the trunks, and Ellis lying still, his face glistening with sweat, his mouth moving as he muttered feverishly, unaware of what was happening.

She made him as comfortable as she could, gave him a drink of cold tea, and then crawled out into the open again. She knew that the police, if they came and if they saw the fallen tree trunks, would look further. It was her job to keep them away from this spot and without hesitation she walked back along the path to the fairway.

A distant clock struck the half-hour after nine as she moved cautiously towards the clubhouse, keeping close to the wood, her eyes alert for any sign of life.

The sun was warm, and heavy dew on the grass soaked the tops of her shoes. She walked easily, the nails in the shoes gripping the ground.

She passed the trench where they had spent the night, and she moved more slowly, aware that her heart was thumping and there was a dryness in her mouth.

She could see the clubhouse now, and she stopped, stood behind a big elm and surveyed the building suspiciously.

There was a bicycle leaning against the clubhouse wall, and two elderly men, wearing caps and mackintosh jerkins, stood near the first tee. One of them was waving his hands and now and then he pointed to the clubhouse.

Grace wondered if they were talking about the burglary. The short, thick-set man who waved his hands seemed excited, and she guessed he was telling the other man what had happened.

Then her heart gave a lurch as a policeman came out of the clubhouse and joined the other two men. They talked. The thick-set man continued to wave his hands, and the policeman stood stolidly listening.

After a few minutes of talk, the policeman began to wander around the clubhouse, his head bent as if he was searching the ground. Grace watched him, fascinated. She knew he was looking for footprints, and wondered if she had left any, guessed she had. A moment later her fears were confirmed as the policeman knelt and appeared to be examining the ground carefully. The two golfers joined him, and suddenly he stood up and pointed to the wood.

Grace caught her breath.

So soon, she thought wildly. If he goes to the wood, he'll find Ellis, and without pausing to think, she stepped from behind the tree and stood out there in the open.

The policeman and the two golfers looked right at her. Not more

than two hundred and fifty yards separated them, but none of them seemed interested in her and she realized it was because she was wearing golf kit and on the course she was accepted as a player.

She turned and began to run, keeping on the top of the crest so that they could see her.

She ran away from the wood towards the second tee. After a few yards, she glanced back. The policeman was waving at her; probably he was shouting, but, of course, she could not hear him. She again broke into a run, and reached the second tee, paused to look back again.

The policeman was coming after her. He ran with a long steady stride and with a lot of speed. The two golfers trotted behind him, but he already had a good fifty yards lead over them.

Grace realized, with fear clutching at her heart, that the policeman could run fast—much faster than Ellis had run when he had tried to catch her. She would need all her speed if she was to keep the lead she had already, and turning, she raced over the wet grass of the fairway, running blind, not knowing where she was going nor caring, so long as she drew them away from Ellis.

CHAPTER NINE

POLICE-CONSTABLE GEORGE ROGERS dug his elbows into his ribs, threw back his head and sprinted over the grass. He prided himself on his prowess as a runner. For the past three years he had won the hundred yards and the mile races at the Taleham local Sports Meeting, and was now the proud owner of two miniature cups which adorned the mantelpiece of his bachelor quarters.

His younger sister, Emily Rogers (she was in service at the Manor House), expressed an opinion that the cups were polished tin and not silver as George Rogers so fondly imagined. Further, she had stated, if the two races had been open to all-comers, instead of to a bunch of village loafers, broken in wind by too many cigarettes, and cripples like George, she would have carried off the cups with her legs tied together (A gross exaggeration, of course, but Emily was given to exaggeration.)

Although Rogers would never admit it to anyone, he knew Emily could beat him in a straight race. She had always shown greater aptitude for games than he had, and this rankled.

So now, as he sprinted across the fairway in pursuit of Grace, he felt a deep satisfaction. This was, once more, a struggle between the sexes, and he was determined to avenge past humiliations. He saw he was gaining on the girl, and as the distance between them shrank, he was able to make out the expensive cut of her skirt and the quality of her leather jerkin. These two items of clothing had an immediate effect on George's yokel mind. He had been brought up to respect the gentry. All his life had been spent in the country,

where class distinction is sharply defined. On one hand, you have the people who own the land; on the other, the people who work the land. It was with the latter class that George dealt; his inspector dealt with the gentry. And as George turned this thought over in his mind, his long strides lost confidence. This young woman, obviously of the upper class if you were to judge by her clothes (and how else were you to judge these days?), although behaving in a suspicious manner, was not breaking the law. There was no law against running across a golf course, and George suddenly wondered if he wasn't rushing blindly into a hideous situation which might end by him receiving a severe reprimand. He had made a point never to take action against anyone who wore a collar and tie or a respectable costume without first consulting his inspector. He was ambitious, and he knew only too well how easily a police officer could lose promotion through over-zealousness.

He kept on, however, but the sting had gone out of his running. Grace gained a few yards, and the two elderly golfers, puffing and blowing in the rear, slowly closed the gap between Rogers and themselves.

The more Rogers considered the idea that he was rushing into trouble the more he longed for the tall, dignified figure of his inspector to loom on the horizon. If he could only receive the official order to pursue this young woman he would have leapt forward and caught her in a moment, but the responsibility of chasing a Jaeger skirt and a Lillywhite jerkin across the fairway undermined his morale.

He saw the girl stagger, and to his alarm the gap between them closed sharply. Instinctively he slowed his own pace, and it was with relief that he saw the girl recover and once more speed on. The stumble gave him an idea. He stumbled himself, and then clumsily threw up his hands and pitched forward, rolling on the ground.

He sat up slowly as the two golfers, the Club Secretary and the Captain of the Team, came up.

"Twisted my ankle, sir," he said apologetically, and touched his boot gingerly. "I'll be all right in a moment."

"Damn it, she's getting away," the Captain of the Team snorted, breathing heavily.

The Club Secretary, a fat man in his late fifties, was too short of breath to speak, but he waved his hands excitedly after Grace as she disappeared down a steep dip in the fairway as if to urge Rogers in pursuit.

Rogers got slowly to his feet.

"I'll be all right in a moment, sir," he said, rubbing his ankle and avoiding the reproachful eyes of the two men. "I suppose it's all right to follow that young lady?" he went on, looking up anxiously. "I know she's behaving in a suspicious manner, sir, but it wouldn't do to frighten one of the Club members, would it, sir?"

The Club Secretary snorted. "She's not a member, damn it,"

he said, struggling to control his laboured breathing. "And what the hell is she running away for?"

"If you ask me, she's stolen those clothes," the Captain of the Team said darkly. "You get after her, Rogers. We'll take full responsibility."

"You will, sir?" Rogers asked, his moon-shaped face lighting up. "If there's a mistake you'll take the responsibility?"

"Of course we will," the Club Secretary returned. "Get after her, man. She'll give us the slip if we're not careful."

"Oh, no, she won't, sir," Rogers returned grimly. This was now quite a different kettle of fish. He had received his orders and he knew exactly where he stood. The responsibility was no longer his, and if this young woman thought she could get away from him, he was going to have the surprise of her life. He refused to believe that there could be another girl who could run as fast as Emily. Admittedly, this young woman had a good start, but he'd catch her. "I'll get her, sir. You come on as fast as you can."

He began to run in the direction Grace had taken, his long legs fairly flying over the grass.

But the delay had been costly. Grace was no longer in sight. To the left of the fairway was a rising slope which finished in a line of bunkers. To the right was a flat wide stretch of grass. It was obvious to Rogers that the girl had run off to the left, and he pelted grimly towards the bunkers.

In the meantime Grace had gone on without looking back. She expected to feel the arresting hand of the law on her shoulder at any minute, but she ran on, her head down, her elbows into her sides, her breath laboured. She fled up the steep slope leading to the line of bunkers, skirted them and ran across the green. She was so intent on her running that she nearly cannoned into the flag, and shied away from it only just in time.

Breathless, she looked over her shoulder. There was nothing to see except the line of bunkers, but she had no means of telling whether the policeman would appear at any moment, and she forced herself on.

Arriving at the crest of the next slope she paused in dismay. A vast flat stretch of country without any cover lay before her. At the far end was a green with an appropriate red flag waving a warning at her. She looked desperately to the right and left, but it was all flat expanse. She was going to be caught! She felt that once he began to run across that coverless expanse the policeman would catch her, and she suddenly gave up, sinking on to the spongy grass, limp and in despair.

A tall, lean shadow of a man fell across the grass at her feet. She looked up fearfully, too exhausted to try to escape. The young man in the canary-coloured sweater stood over her. His golf bag was slung over his shoulder and his startlingly green eyes were sympathetic.

"You seem to have made a bit of a mess of it," he said. "There's a policeman coming. Did you let him see you?"

She nodded, too tired and frightened to speak.

"Well, what are you going to do? Give in tamely?"

She looked up. Did he mean to help her?

"What can I do?" she asked, struggling to her feet.

"Not much, but I might . . ." the young man looked back over his shoulder. The policeman wasn't yet in sight. "I think I will. Now, don't say anything when they come. Leave it all to me." He eyed her thoughtfully. "You're deaf, aren't you?"

Grace felt a hot, crimson wave rise to her face.

"Yes," she said.

"I thought so. All right, you leave everything to me." He glanced over his shoulder again. "You'd better know who I am. My name's Richard Crane. I live over there." He waved his hand towards the distant wood where Ellis lay hidden. "Do you play golf?"

She shook her head.

"Never mind; I'll teach you. It's not a bad game. Let's walk over to that green. I'll put a ball down in case the bobby is suspicious."

He dropped a ball on the fairway, selected an iron from the bag and hit the ball down the fairway on to the green.

"Looks easy, doesn't it? But it isn't. Here, have a try." He dropped another ball on the grass. "Don't try to hit it hard; just swing the club. The club head will do the rest."

"No," she protested, bewildered. "They'll be here in a minute." A thought flashed through her mind that his young man was mad.

But the green eyes compelled her, and she took the club, feeling a strange weakness in her limbs.

"Stand over the ball, and when you bring the club back, try to keep your left arm straight. You'll hit it if you don't look up."

Out of the corner of her eye, Grace saw the policeman appear over the top of the slope. She wanted to drop the club and run, but Crane's hands suddenly closed over hers. They were cool, fleshy hands, strong and flexible. She looked up at him beseechingly.

"It's your only chance," he said. "Swing the club and keep your head down, and you'll hit it. Don't pay any attention to the bobby. I'll handle him."

He stepped back, waving Rogers impatiently away.

Without thinking, she swung the club at the ball. She saw the ball sail away into the air, hang for a moment and then descend fifty feet or so from the green.

Crane turned and smiled at Rogers who was gaping at him.

"Not a bad shot for a beginner, was it?" he said quietly. "Do you play golf, Rogers?"

Rogers was flummoxed. He gaped at Crane, and then at Grace, muttered that he didn't play golf."

"You don't know what you've missed," Crane went on easily. "It's a grand game." He suddenly looked sharply at Rogers, who became even more uneasy. "What on earth are you doing up here, Rogers? After poachers or something?"

"No, sir," Rogers returned miserably, looking at Grace. "It was the young lady, sir." He glanced round and saw the Club Secretary and the Captain of the Team pounding along towards them. "These gentlemen will explain."

Crane took hold of Grace's arm.

"Let's see what all this is about," he said as she met his eyes. "Surely they're not making a fuss because I forgot to pay your green fee," and he laughed to show he was joking. He seemed calm, and Grace made an effort to seem calm herself, although her legs were so shaky she had difficulty in standing up. Together they walked towards the two men who had come to an abrupt standstill when they saw Crane. Rogers followed them.

"Good morning," Crane said cheerily to the Club Secretary. "You seem to be taking some pretty violent exercise this morning. May I introduce my sister, Mrs. Brewer, who's staying with me?"

The Club Secretary, red in the face and panting, opened his mouth and then abruptly shut it. His eyes bulged as he glared at Grace.

"Your sister?" the Captain of the Team repeated blankly. "She's staying with you?"

"Don't look so surprised," Crane returned, smiling. "I'm not doing anything out of the way by entertaining my sister, am I?"

"Of course not," the Captain of the Team said hurriedly. ('His sister, my foot,' he thought. 'She's no more his sister than I am. Why, she's a shop-girl, a chit. Good Lord! Looks as if we'd run into a delicate situation. I suppose she's his fancy piece for the night. I wonder if West has cottoned on to the situation.')

"Julie," Crane said to Grace, "this is Mr. Malcolm, the Captain of the Club team (such as it is), and that gentleman who is so short of breath is Mr. West, the Club Secretary. The gentleman in blue is George Rogers, who bowls for the village cricket team when he is not arresting deserving labourers for pinching a stray rabbit."

Grace forced a smile to her frozen face. The three men regarded her with mixed feelings. They said nothing.

"Mrs. Brewer is deaf," Crane went on calmly. "She lip reads, but she may not understand everything you say, so she'll excuse you for not welcoming her on her first visit to the club."

West, the Club Secretary, looked awkward, muttered something about being delighted to meet Mrs. Brewer.

"The fact of the matter is the clubhouse has been broken into," Malcolm said, determined if he could to make Crane uncomfortable (confounded cheek of the fellow to bring his piece up on the course), "and a number of articles are missing. We saw Mrs. Brewer on the course, realized she was not a member and called to her. She promptly ran away and we told Rogers to go after her."

Crane raised his eyebrows. "You told Rogers to go after her!" he repeated. "What on earth for?" He suddenly frowned. "You're not suggesting that my sister has anything to do with your robbery, are you?"

Malcolm, who was a lawyer by profession, suddenly realized that he would have to be careful.

"Of course not, my dear chap," he said, and laughed. "Only it did seem odd that Mrs. Brewer should run away as she did."

"I had no idea it was considered odd for anyone to run on the course," Crane said dryly. He looked at West. "I can't remember seeing anything against running in your local rules."

"Please be reasonable," West said uncomfortably. "Rogers called to Mrs. Brewer and she promptly ran away. She is a stranger and naturally we were a little suspicious. . . ."

"I've already told you my sister is deaf," Crane returned patiently. "The subject is a painful one. She didn't hear Rogers call and she was running because she wanted to catch me up. I had promised to give her a golf lesson and she was late. Now are you satisfied or do you really want to pursue this stupid business?"

Rogers thought it was time to say something. "That's quite all right, sir," he said eagerly. "I quite understand how the mistake occurred, and I hope I haven't inconvenienced the young lady." He was most anxious that Crane shouldn't complain to his inspector. "Well, we'll get back to the clubhouse. I think this chap made off in the woods."

Grace started imperceptibly. Only Crane, who was holding her arm, noticed her sudden agitation.

"It's no use looking for him in the woods," he said smoothly. "I think I saw the fellow as I came on to the course. He was walking towards the woods, but he turned off and headed for the railway."

"You saw him, sir?" Rogers asked, brightening.

Crane nodded, aware that Grace was watching him. "It must have been the chap. He was carrying a large bundle under his arm. I suppose you want a description?"

Rogers had taken out his notebook and was already moistening the blunt pencil point with his tongue.

"If you please, sir," he said.

"He was a young chap, about nineteen, I should think," Crane said without hesitation. "Tall, dark hair, in a blue suit and brown shoes. He had on a green shirt and a black tie. He wore no hat and he had a slight limp. A pretty easy fellow to spot if you're quick."

"That's so, sir," Rogers returned, beaming. "Well, I'll get off. Thank you, sir, very much for your help, and I apologize again for any . . ."

"That's all right, Rogers," Crane said, nodding. "I hope you catch the chap." He looked at West and Malcolm. "Now may we go on with our interrupted game?"

"Of course," West said stiffly. "You'll pay Mrs. Brewer's green fee when you come in?"

"I wouldn't dream of forgetting," Crane said mockingly. "Sorry you had all that run for nothing." He touched Grace's arm and together they walked towards the distant green, leaving West and Malcolm to stare after them.

CHAPTER TEN

"He's unconscious," Crane said, his fingers on Ellis's pulse. "We'll have to get a doctor for him at once. I'm afraid he's pretty bad."

Grace wrung her hands. It was all going wrong. Ellis had said, "If you get a doctor we're sunk. You've got to work this out for yourself. I'd rather die than be caught." She had tried to get rid of Crane as soon as Malcolm and West were out of sight, but he wouldn't listen to any of her excuses. He was kind and sympathetic, but firm, and she suspected her feeble efforts to evade his questions merely amused him, although he did not show it. A direct question trapped her into admitting that she had a companion who was ill.

"I knew it," Crane said, smiling at her. "Don't look so tragic. I knew you must have someone with you because you took those clothes. Then I noticed the stretcher was missing and saw the handkerchief on the tree. That's where he is, isn't it? In the wood?"

She nodded miserably.

"Well, cheer up. If he's ill I may be able to help him."

She instinctively felt that he would not give them away to the police, and besides, she did not know what else to do, so she led him to the place where she had hidden Ellis, but now he was talking about a doctor—the one person Ellis had particularly warned her against.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "He wouldn't wish it. He said I wasn't to call a doctor."

Crane studied Ellis's flushed face, wondered who he was and why this odd, deaf girl seemed so scared.

"He's not in the position to choose," he reminded her. "Don't you understand? He's very ill—he may die."

She flinched. "I can't help it," she said stubbornly. "He wouldn't wish it. He made me promise." She added after a pause, "a promise is a promise."

"But he might die," Crane repeated patiently.

"He knew that. He said he'd rather die than be——" She stopped in time, horrified she had so nearly given away their secret.

"Than be—what?"

"Oh, nothing. It doesn't matter. But you mustn't call a doctor. I can look after him. I—I won't let him die."

Crane remained kneeling beside the unconscious Ellis for a moment, then he shrugged, stood up.

"Who is he?" he asked abruptly.

"A friend of mine," she returned guardedly. Feeling she should say more, she added, "he's been good to me."

"That doesn't tell me anything. Who is he? What's happened to his leg?"

"He fell. It's broken, but I've set it. I think it'll be all right." She looked away, silent, a stubborn expression in her eyes.

Crane frowned. "I would like to help you," he said, touching her arm so that she should know he was speaking. The touch of his fingers on the soft leather jerkin sent a little shiver of pleasure through her. It was a strange feeling that she had never before experienced and she felt blood rush to her face.

"I can help you if you'll tell me the truth," he went on, not appearing to notice her embarrassment. "Who are you? What are you two doing here? What sort of trouble are you in?"

She longed to tell him, to be able to share the responsibility with him, but she knew how angry Ellis would be if she did, and that he would consider she had betrayed him.

"Please leave me alone," she burst out, her mind crawling with sudden panic. "I don't want your help. I want to be left alone. Please go away."

He shook his head. "Don't get excited," he said, smiling. "All right, I won't ask any more questions, but I'm not leaving you. You can't manage alone. You may think you can, but it's not possible. If you don't get him under cover and give him proper care, he'll die. It looks to me like pneumonia." His green eyes searched her face. "Would you mind if he dies?"

She nodded at once. "Oh, yes, he's been good to me," she said. "And I promised he wouldn't die."

"And a promise is a promise," he said, teasing her. He looked again at Ellis. "I shouldn't have thought he would have been good to anyone," he went on thoughtfully. "There's much cruelty and bitterness in that face."

She knew how cruel and bitter Ellis could be, but that made no difference now. He had helped her when she most needed help, knowing that there would come a time when she would repay him: that time had come.

"We must get on," Crane said abruptly. "The local inspector isn't a simpleton. He wouldn't have been put off with the tale I told Rogers, and he would have noticed the stretcher was missing." He bent over Ellis, stared thoughtfully. "This chap's going to die if we're not careful. You take the foot of the stretcher and I'll take the head. I don't think he'll be too heavy for you."

Grace hesitated. "Where are we going?"

"To my place. There's nowhere else. At least I don't know of any other place. Do you?"

She said, "No," slowly.

"Well then, come on."

Still she hesitated. What would Ellis say to her when he recovered to find himself in a stranger's house? She cringed, remembering his sneering eyes and bitter tongue.

"There's no other way," Crane said gently. He was patient and kind, appearing to understand why she hesitated.

She nodded wearily, grasped the handles of the stretcher. It

was heavy, but nothing seemed to matter to her now. She hadn't succeeded in getting Ellis out of this mess, and she was crushed by her failure.

She walked down the narrow path, up a slight incline and then down through more trees. The stretcher bowed her down, but she kept on, staggering a little as she walked. She would have liked to have heard an encouraging word from Crane, and for the second time that day, her deafness swamped her with misery.

A few minutes of walking brought them out of the wood to a narrow lane. At the end of the lane she caught sight of a red tiled roof, and guessed rightly that this was Crane's house.

She looked back inquiringly over her shoulder.

"It's all right," he said. "There's no one there. Go straight on. We won't meet anyone."

She continued up the lane until she reached a wooden gate leading to the house. Then she set down the stretcher, aware that her arms ached and her knees were weak. She pushed open the gate as Crane came up to help her.

"The sooner we get him into the house the better," he said, looking up and down the lane. "Few people come this way, but we mustn't take chances."

Ellis groaned suddenly, startling Crane, who glanced at him sharply. Ellis half sat up, blinked round, his hand going to his head.

Grace went to him. She supported his head and peered at him anxiously, but he didn't seem to recognize her and a moment later his eyes closed and he dropped back.

"Let's get him inside," Crane said, looking worried.

They went up the twisting drive, carrying the stretcher between them. Once clear of the sheltering hedges and trees, Grace saw the house. It was a big white bungalow with a staring red roof and red-painted window-frames. There was a gayness about the building that pleased her. It stood in a garden bursting with colour and fertility, and the big lawn, stretching away to overshadowing trees, was like a billiard table.

At the front door, she paused, set the stretcher down again.

"Well, here we are," Crane said, coming to her. "You're safe now. No one ever comes here."

She didn't say anything, but waited, wondering what the next move was to be.

He took out his bunch of keys and opened the front door.

"Let's get him inside," he said, "and then we can see just how bad he is."

They carried Ellis into the lounge-hall which was so luxuriously furnished that Grace paused to stare round in bewilderment. Crane, moving forward, pushed the stretcher against the back of her knees, making her stagger.

She looked back at him.

"To your right," he said. "The first door. Can you manage?"

She pulled herself together, opened the door, edged her way into

a bright room full of flowers and expensive furniture. By the window was a large divan bed covered with a red and blue embroidered bedspread.

She was glad to set the stretcher down, and she stood back, rubbing her aching arms while she stared round the room. She was stupefied by its comfort and richness; it was something she imagined only existed in furniture catalogues.

"All right," Crane said, watching her with an amused smile. "We'll leave him for a moment and get you fixed up. Come along with me."

"Oh, no," she said hurriedly. "He's ill. We mustn't leave him."

"Now, don't worry. I'll see to him. While I'm fixing him up I expect you'd like a bath. Come along and don't argue. I'll show you your room, and then you can look after yourself."

Reluctantly she followed him into a room at the far end of the passage."

"Will this do?" he asked, standing aside.

She caught her breath. It was even more lavishly furnished than the other room, obviously to please a sophisticated woman.

"Do?" she repeated, staring at him. "It's beautiful. You can't mean it's for me?"

"Why not?" he said carelessly. "It's nice, but nothing out of the way. It's yours anyway until we decide what our plans are going to be. There's a bathroom through there. Make yourself at home." He walked past her, opened the door of a large fitted wardrobe. "You can borrow anything in here. I think they'll fit you, but I'm sure you won't worry too much if they don't."

Scarcely believing her eyes, Grace saw the wardrobe was crammed with dresses, frocks and costumes. Without appearing to notice her astonishment he pulled open the drawers.

"There's everything you need . . . even silk stockings. You ought to have a fine time making yourself look smart."

"But I couldn't . . ." Grace began, her face turning scarlet.

"You'll like this stuff a lot better than Chrissy Taylor's skirt," he said, smiling, "and this time you have permission to wear them." He turned suddenly to look out of the window. "They were my sister's things. She's dead. I haven't disturbed the room. It used to be hers. There's no point in keeping this junk. You'd better use it."

"Oh," Grace said, stepping back. "I—couldn't. They're too good for me . . . oh, no, I couldn't . . ."

An odd expression filtered through the green eyes but was instantly gone. Although Grace only caught a glimpse of it, she was puzzled, but looking at him again she saw only the patient humorous expression in his eyes she had come to expect to see and she was reassured.

"She wouldn't mind. You'd 've liked her. She was always ready to help a lame dog over a stile. She would want you to have those clothes, so please don't be stupid. I'll leave you to have a bath and to

pick something that'll suit you. I like my guests to look nice."

He turned to the door but she stopped him.

"But I don't understand," she said breathlessly. "Why are you doing this? You don't know anything about me. Why should you do this for a stranger?"

"I like to help people," he said casually. "Besides I think you're in trouble. I've been in trouble myself and I know what it means to have help when everyone else's hand is against you." He laughed. "And it makes me feel very virtuous." He ran his fingers through his straw-coloured hair. "He's in trouble too, isn't he? He interests me. I have a feeling he's bad, and bad people attract me. It's morbid, I know, but they are so much more interesting than the ordinary people one meets every day. Who is he? I wish you'd tell me."

"I don't know," she confessed reluctantly. "I've been wondering myself who he is."

"Well, we'll find out," Crane said. "Now I'll get him into bed. You have a bath. Don't worry about anything. When I've made him comfortable I'll get you some food. I haven't had breakfast myself yet and all this excitement has made me hungry."

He went to the door, paused and looked at her intently. Again she thought there was an odd expression in his eyes, but as he was standing with his back to the light she couldn't be sure.

"There's a bolt on the door," he said. "I like bolts, don't you? They give me a feeling of security." His face lit up with his pleasant smile and he went away, closing the door softly behind him.

Grace stood staring at the door panels, suddenly uneasy. She reached forward and quickly pushed the bolt into its socket. It slid into place quietly and she noticed that the barrel of the bolt glistened with oil.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LYING in the deep sunken bath Grace ceased to think about Ellis. He slipped from her mind as easily as quicksilver slips through your fingers. Resting her head against the waterproof pillow at the head of the bath, her toes under the glittering chromium taps. She surrendered herself to a feeling of lassitude, and with closed eyes, allowed her mind to remain suspended in a vacuum of sensual pleasure.

The bathroom was small but luxurious. Apple green tiled walls were divided by a broad band of shining chromium. The floor was checkered by green and black squares, and a small green lacquered dressing-table, before which was a thick white rug, was loaded with cosmetics, perfumes and toilet accessories.

Grace had often seen such luxury on the films but the idea that she herself should have a room like this took her breath away.

Her mind was stunned by this fantastic transformation. A few

hours ago she had been crouching in a damp trench in stolen clothes, wet, dirty and hunted by the police. Now she was clean, temporarily safe and in love.

She had read of people falling in love at first sight, had seen it happen often enough on the films, but she hadn't really believed such a thing possible; but now, she realized it had happened to her.

She had said to Ellis, "No one has ever been kind to me," and she had been grateful to him for throwing a ruined meat-pie in her face when she had been starving. She had thought that act was kindness since she had no other standard from which to judge. Then Richard Crane had come into her life. He had been kind, giving her this unbelievable luxury, offering her clothes—not soiled, cast-off, unwanted clothing people had given her in the past, but model gowns and fashionable dresses—the kind you saw in the windows of exclusive West End shops. He had saved her from the police, taken her into his home without forcing her to tell him who she was, and had been kind about her deafness.

At first, she had been suspicious of this kindness, but now she was free of panic and could think clearly, she began to wonder if he too hadn't fallen in love with her as she with him. Was that the explanation of his generosity and obvious desire to protect her? she asked herself. Surely no man would risk so much for a girl about whom he knew nothing unless he had fallen in love with her?

Like most uneducated, lower-class girls Grace was essentially a romantic. She devoured paper novelettes, and in her dreams lived the rôles of her favourite film stars, imagining that some day a Prince Charming would discover her and whisk her away from poverty to a life of love, happiness and wealth.

Since she had lost her hearing she had known instinctively that her chances of having a husband and a home were even more remote. But now her hopes flared up and against her better judgment—for, in spite of her romantic dreams, Grace was practical and no fool—she decided it was just possible that Crane had fallen in love with her.

She wasn't beautiful, she told herself, but perhaps he didn't think beauty was necessary. Perhaps he had seen at once that she would do anything to please him, would keep this lovely place of his perfectly, would be loyal and true to him until she died. Tears came into her eyes when she thought of dying, of leaving him, old and lonely, to look after himself.

She sighed, closed her eyes, and for a time her mind swam in a treacly sea of romantic sentimentality.

Then abruptly she remembered her responsibilities. She couldn't lie in the bath day-dreaming like this while Richard—she thought of him as Richard now—was nursing Ellis. Her place was at his side.

She scrambled out of the bath, dried herself hurriedly and although she wished to be with him immediately, she could not resist

pausing to powder herself with the huge puff on the dressing-table.

Naked, the yellow ball of swan's down in her hand, she looked at herself in the full-length mirror. Even to her critical eyes she admitted that her body was pleasing, and she had a sudden, wild, unbridled desire to offer herself to Crane as a token of her love and gratitude. But the moment the idea had crossed her mind she shied away from it. The beatings she had received from her foster-father had left scars on her mind. He had flogged into her the knowledge that her mother was bad and had given herself to any man who fancied her. Grace had accepted his doctrine that there was no worse sin a woman could commit and that no decent man would respect her if she did yield to him.

With a feeling of guilt, she hurriedly slipped into her silk wrap and sat on the stool before the mirror. Her hair, freshly shampooed, looked soft and wavy. She ran a comb through it, still disturbed in her mind, and adjusted the thick tresses with clips. She hesitated before putting on lipstick, but her lips were so pale she decided she must make the best of herself if only to please Richard.

Once again in the bedroom she slipped into the dress she had selected from the dozen or so costumes and frocks in the wardrobe. It was a dress of deep blue with a long, narrow V neck and three-quarter sleeves. She glanced at herself in the mirror and was startled and delighted by the transformation. The dress fitted her as if it had been made for her, and she scarcely recognized herself, realizing with delight that she was looking quite attractive.

But this was no time for preening, she told herself, and with a final glance into the mirror, she slid back the bolt and opened the bedroom door.

The smell of bacon frying told her where to look for the kitchen, and as she walked down the passage to a half-open door she suddenly felt self-conscious and almost dreaded to meet Crane again. Suppose she looked into his eyes and saw she was mistaken and that he didn't love her as she thought? Suppose he didn't find her attractive after all the trouble she had taken?

Timidly she pushed open the door and looked into a beautifully appointed kitchen, fitted with every conceivable labour-saving device, and decorated in white and royal blue.

Crane was standing by an electric cooker, a cigarette in his mouth and a fork in his hand. He glanced round with a smile when he heard her come in but when he caught sight of her the smile froze on his face and he gave a convulsive start.

There was a long pause, neither of them saying anything. Grace went cold as she saw his skin change from healthy tan to a greenish grey. Sheer naked terror had sprung into his eyes, his mouth was loose and slack and he seemed unable to breathe.

The slight clatter of the fork as it fell from his fingers on to the floor seemed to rouse him, and he attempted to pull himself together, his mouth twisting into a ghastly effort to smile.

Grace stepped back, her hand to her mouth, her eyes wide with fright.

"I thought it was Julie," he said, the muscles in his face stiff, his eyes still dark with terror. "I—I really thought you were Julie. . . ." and abruptly he pushed past her and almost ran from the room, leaving her staring after him.

With an effort Grace controlled her rising panic. She picked up the fork and mechanically moved the slices of bacon in the frying pan. The electric kettle began to pour out a jet of steam, and she made coffee. She wouldn't let herself think, forcing herself to complete the preparation for breakfast. When it was ready she had a grip on her nerves and she did not flinch when Crane returned to the room. He too had himself under control, and the kind, humorous expression was once more in his eyes, but Grace drew away from him as he approached her, her eyes searching his face.

"I can't say how sorry I am to have given you such a fright," he said. She smelt brandy on his breath as he spoke to her, and she flinched, moving still further away. "Please forgive me," he went on. "I was thinking and I didn't hear you come in. That dress was one of her favourites, and—and well, you did look like her. It's odd, but she used to dress her hair the way you've dressed yours. You scared me out of my senses."

"Oh," she said, instantly sorry for him, and no longer frightened. "I'm sorry, too. I couldn't think . . ." Without realizing what she was doing, she put her hand on his arm.

"It was stupid of me," he said, patted her hand and moved away. It was a friendly gesture, but she was hurt that he so obviously avoided her touch. "You see, Julie's only been dead a few months, and I miss her—I miss her badly, and seeing you so unexpectedly I thought . . ." for a fleeting moment the calm expression in his eyes slipped and she saw terror again there, but he quickly controlled himself ". . . she'd come back." He picked up the coffee-pot. "Well, come on, let's eat. I'm starving and I'm sure you must be too." He looked at her quickly. "And you so startled me I haven't even said how nice you look. Why, you look wonderful."

She knew at once that for the first time since they had met he was being insincere, that he didn't think she looked wonderful and that he wished she hadn't put on that particular dress. She was so disappointed that she could have cried, blaming herself for spoiling a moment that could have been precious to them both.

"You take the dish in and I'll bring the coffee and toast," he went on, moving to the door.

She picked up the dish of bacon and mushrooms and followed him into the long, narrow sitting-room. He had laid the table and he set down the coffee and toast, took the dish from her and placed it on the hot plate.

"Now, let's eat."

But she couldn't until she had changed the dress.

"I won't be a moment," she said and fled back to her bedroom.

She hurriedly pulled the dress over her head, sending a cascade of hair clips flying in all directions, and tossed it on the bed. She ran to the wardrobe, opened it, snatched down a simple frock of gay-checked gingham from its hanger. When she had slipped into it, she went to the dressing-table and fluffed up her hair, leaving it loose on her shoulders. She knew she didn't look so attractive in this dress, but that couldn't be helped. She wasn't going to risk any more insincere compliments from Crane, nor did she wish to remind him of his dead sister.

She returned to the sitting-room, paused outside to smooth down the dress, opened the door and went in.

Crane looked at her and instantly his face lit up.

"What a nice child you are," he said. "To have taken all that trouble just because I behaved like a fool. Come on and sit down. That dress suits you. You know you're quite an attractive little thing . . . but perhaps someone else has told you that."

With a feeling of suffocating happiness Grace knew this time he meant the compliment. He went on before she could think of anything to say. "You haven't told me your name. Won't you?"

"Grace," she said, hesitated, remembering that the newspaper had mentioned her name, decided to lie. "Grace Stuart."

He smiled. "A fine old historical name. May I call you Grace?"

She flushed scarlet.

"Yes," she said, looking down at her plate. "Oh, yes, please."

This time he laughed. "We'll have to have a serious talk before long, but there's still a lot to do. You get on with breakfast. As soon as I've finished I must get that stretcher out of the way. It wouldn't do for anyone to find it here."

She suddenly thought of Ellis.

"How is—he?"

Crane shook his head. "He's bad, but I've got him to bed and he seems comfortable. Perhaps you'd better keep an eye on him while I'm out. I shan't be long. He's still unconscious and he's been raving. Did you know he speaks German? He's not a German, is he?" She was aware that he was looking at her intently.

"Oh, no . . . his name's David Ellis. I—I've seen his identity card."

"Funny. He's talking a lot of rot in German . . ."

Grace looked blank. "Rot?"

"Never mind," Crane said abruptly, finished his coffee and pushed back his chair. "I'll get off if you'll excuse me. I want to plant that stretcher somewhere before anyone spots it's missing. I'll take those clothes you borrowed too." As she made to rise he waved her back to her seat. "Finish your breakfast. You must be starving. When I come back we'll have a talk."

She sat at the table long after the click of the gate swinging to told her that he had gone and left her alone with Ellis.

What was going to happen to her? she asked herself. What plan

would he make for her when he returned? She was uncertain now about his love for her. There had been no light in his eyes when he had looked at her, and yet he was so kind and understanding. She bit her lip with vexation when she thought of the fright she had given him. It was understandable for him to have looked like that although at the time he had frightened her. He had looked ghastly . . . terrified . . . almost as if . . . but she caught herself up. Guilty? Why should she think he had looked guilty? Was that being loyal after all he had done for her? She got up quickly, cleared the table and put the plates, cups and breakfast things on the trolley and pushed it into the kitchen.

She'd better look at Ellis, she thought, although now Ellis meant nothing to her. Her mind was obsessed with Crane and Ellis was a nuisance, likely to interfere with Crane's plans for her.

She opened the bedroom door, entered.

Ellis lay on his back, his face flushed, his hands clenched at his sides. He opened his eyes as she came up to the bed and stared at her.

"I've been waiting for you," he said in a low weak voice. "Where have you been?"

"You'll be all right," she said, stooping over him. "You're ill, but you'll be all right." She spoke without thinking, aware with a slight feeling of shame that she did not care what happened to him.

"How do you know I'll be all right?" he muttered, ugly rage in his eyes.

"You must keep quiet . . ." she began, broke off with a strangled gasp as his hands shot up and caught her round her throat. He dragged her down on top of him so that she sprawled across the bed, helpless in his grip.

"You bitch!" he snarled at her. "You don't give a damn now you've found a fancy man. You're selling yourself to him, aren't you? I know. You bitches are all alike. You trade yourselves for clothes and a full belly. You don't care what happens to me. Do you think he'll care? He'll throw me out . . . turn me over to the police . . . so long as he can get what he wants out of you!"

Terrified, Grace struck blindly at him, her fist hitting him in the face. His hands slipped off her throat and he went limp, the effort of holding her being too much for him.

She scrambled away from him, leaned against the wall, her face white and her breath coming in laboured gasps.

"You're wrong," she said. "I'm going to look after you . . . I said I would and I won't break my word, but you mustn't talk like that." She suddenly became angry. "How dare you say anything against him. He's kind! Do you hear? He's kind! Something you don't even know the meaning of."

Ellis closed his eyes.

"Oh, shut up," he sneered. "He only wants one thing, and he'll get it from you, you weak, stupid little fool. Get out of my sight."

"You mustn't talk like that," she said, shocked. "I want to help you, but I won't if you say things like that, and besides it's bad for you to excite yourself. You must keep quiet."

Ellis waved her away, and then suddenly stiffened. "What's that?" he asked, listening. "There's someone out there."

Grace ran to the window, peered through the white muslin curtains. Her heart turned a somersault when she saw a tall figure in police uniform coming slowly up the drive.

"It's the police," she said, jumping back.

Ellis snarled, showing his teeth.

"Do something, you fool," he said. "Get me a knife or something. They won't take me alive."

She seemed to gain courage from his cringing terror.

"Don't make a sound," she said. "I won't let him in. If I can keep him talking until Richard comes back . . ."

Ellis whispered frantically, "Give me a knife . . ."

There was a sharp ring on the bell, followed by a loud double rap on the knocker.

Without looking at Ellis, her face white, Grace went from the bedroom, down the passage to the front door.

CHAPTER TWELVE

INSPECTOR JAMES was a lean, grizzled man of sixty who had seen service as a Regimental Sergeant-Major in the 1914-18 war.

Tall, upright and impressive to look at, he stood on the doorstep, his keen eyes examining Grace with interested but courteous scrutiny. The rambling report he had received from P.C. Rogers had raised his curiosity, and the confidential chat he had had with Mr. West and Mr. Malcolm had shocked him..

"He says the woman is his sister," Mr. West had said, while Mr. Malcolm had smiled superciliously. "I don't believe a word of it. She's dressed all right, of course, but anyone with half an eye can see she's his fancy bit. They're no more alike than I am like you, and besides, she looks like a little shop girl."

"And what's more," Malcolm had put in, "they're up there together unchaperoned."

Although disturbed by the robbery at the clubhouse, James was far more startled to learn that secretive adultery was being committed in the village, and he hoped that a gentle hint in the right direction would terminate the sordid affair before it became village gossip.

Inspector James considered it was the duty of the upper classes to set a high moral example, and since Crane was an exceedingly rich young man, and in spite of the fact that he took little active interest in the affairs of the village, James still regarded him as a man of considerable influence. He thought it was in the worst

possible taste for Crane to have some young woman living with him, and in spite of the subterfuge of saying that she was his sister, rumours would soon be rife and the whole moral structure of the youth of the village might easily be undermined.

Inspector James was expecting to be confronted by a blonde beauty with scarlet finger-nails and even perhaps in a clinging négligé. He was therefore considerably surprised and perturbed when he found himself face to face with Grace. He saw immediately that she was not a member of the upper class and realized why Mr. West and Mr. Malcolm had voiced their suspicions. This young woman just could not be any relation of Crane's.

Unlike Rogers he was not misled by the way she was dressed. Here was a young woman of the lower classes, he decided, of no particular breeding, attired in an extremely expensive but admittedly (and here he was a little disappointed) modest frock, with an unusually good figure and pretty legs (Inspector James had an eye for pretty legs, a subject he shared with nobody). Although the young woman was obviously nervous, there was nothing shameless about her, and James found himself thinking it would be pleasant if his own daughter was as modest as this young woman seemed to be.

"Good morning, ma'am," he said, saluting and inclining his ramrod figure. "I hope I'm not disturbing you by such an early call, but I understand you may be able to give me some information concerning a robbery at the Taleham Golf Club that took place in the early hours of this morning. I am Inspector James, and this district is in my care. Up to now, I may say, it has been a very pleasant charge, but this robbery has spoilt a record of fifteen crimeless years." A wintry smile crossed his face. "You will appreciate, I'm sure, ma'am, that people are nervous these days, and it would never do to let them think that we're in for a crime wave. Enough of that is going on in London at the present moment, and we don't want any of it here." He stroked his grey moustache, shook his head dolefully. "There's only one way to stamp out a crime wave, ma'am," he continued, his eyes never leaving Grace's white, tense face. "Immediate action must be taken to arrest the offender, and that, ma'am, is why I have called on you. Any information you may be able to give me will be treated as confidential and will be acted upon with discretion."

Grace found the tall, lean figure was bearing down on her, and she gave ground, hypnotized by the gentle voice and the steady stream of words.

Before she knew what was happening, James was in the hall, closing the front door behind him.

"You have a nice place here, ma'am," he said, glancing round. "Not every newly-married couple can claim a home as nice as this. From what I've seen of most of the new houses and that nasty utility furniture it's better to stay single." He edged his way towards the sitting-room. "It's most kind of you to let me in, ma'am," he

went on. "I've had a long, tiring walk and I'm not as young as I was, although I mustn't grumble considering I've had four years of trench warfare and have been twice blown sky high by high explosives." He opened the sitting-room door, stood aside to allow Grace to enter.

"I—I don't know anything about the robbery," she burst out, now thoroughly frightened.

The inspector apparently did not hear this statement. He selected the most comfortable chair in the room and lowered himself into it with a grateful sigh.

"A very restful and beautiful room if I may say so, ma'am," he said, then glanced up, his eyes suddenly piercing. "I am addressing Mrs. Richard Crane, I presume?"

"Oh no," Grace said, her face turning scarlet. "I'm not Mrs. Crane."

James raised his eyebrows. He appeared to be too astonished to speak for a few moments. "Not Mrs. Crane?" he said at last. "Now, that's very odd. It's not like me to make a mistake. Very odd indeed. I understood there was a young lady staying with Mr. Crane, and I naturally supposed she was his wife. I did hear somewhere that he had married recently or am I thinking of someone else?" He shook his head. "I may be. An old man's failing, I'm afraid. At one time my memory was remarkably good, but these days it's unreliable." He shook his head again. "The penalty of old age."

Grace stood by the door, her knees weak and her heart hammering against her ribs. She said nothing, waited.

"Perhaps you're Miss Crane?" James went on, his face lighting up hopefully.

"I—I'm Mrs. Julie Brewer," Grace said desperately, remembering the name by which Crane had introduced her to the Club Secretary. "I'm Mr. Crane's sister."

"I see," James said, looking at her thoughtfully. "His sister, eh? I see."

There was a long, painful silence, then James went on, "Well, Mrs. Brewer, perhaps you can help me. I understand you were on the golf course early this morning. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"What time were you there?"

"About nine o'clock."

"About nine o'clock," James repeated, taking a notebook from his pocket. "I think I'll make a note of that. As I've already mentioned my memory is not what it was. So you were on the golf course about nine o'clock. Were you with Mr. Crane?"

"I was alone at the time," Grace said, looking anywhere but at the inspector. "Mr. Crane promised to give me a lesson and I was late. I—I overslept and he went without me. I was trying to find him when—when your—the policeman saw me."

"I see," James said, nodding. "You're deaf, I understand?" he

went on gently after a pause. "You didn't hear the police constable shout to you."

Grace looked away. "Yes, I'm deaf," she said bitterly.

"Very sad, I'm sure," James said, watching her. "The results of the war?"

Grace nodded.

"And did you see anyone besides Mr. Crane while you were on the course?"

"Only Mr. West and Mr. Malcolm and the police officer."

"No one else?"

"No."

"You're quite sure of that? I understand Mr. Crane saw a man carrying a bundle under his arm. Did you see him?"

"No."

"So you can't help me at all, Mrs. Brewer?" James asked, and tapped his notebook thoughtfully with his finger-nail.

"I'm afraid not. If—if you'll excuse me now I have things to do."

A frosty expression came into the blue eyes. Inspector James was not accustomed to be dismissed by a member of the lower classes.

"All in good time, Mrs. Brewer," he said. "I should like a few particulars about yourself in case I should need to contact you again. May I have your address?"

"I'm staying here," Grace said, clenching her fists behind her back.

"Will you be here long?"

"Yes." She wanted to tell him to mind his own business but his uniform cowed her.

"One more thing," James said, rising to his feet. He was now firmly convinced that this young woman was not Crane's sister. There was no resemblance, and besides anyone could see she was out of place, in spite of her good clothes, in this luxury bungalow. "May I see your identity card, ma'am? I make it a rule to note the numbers of all identity cards of visitors who are staying some time in the village. It assists in many ways."

Grace felt her face turn white. The room spun before her eyes and she knew James was watching her with suspicious interest. But she made an effort and pulled herself together.

"Yes, you can see it," she said dully, turned to the door. "If—if you'll wait, I'll fetch it."

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you, ma'am, but it would be helpful," James said, sudden doubt in his eyes. If this young woman's name was really Julie Brewer and if Crane returned suddenly, the situation might turn awkward.

Grace went from the room, closed the door behind her. For a moment she nearly gave way to blind panic. She wanted to run out of the house, to escape before it was too late, but she remembered Ellis, lying helpless in bed, and she fought down her fear.

She stood hesitating, wondering what she was going to do, then

decided to consult Ellis. He might be able to think of a way out, but as she moved down the passage, the front door opened silently and Crane came in.

Grace gave a gasp of relief and ran to him. He saw at once that something was wrong, and took her swiftly into the kitchen.

"What is it?" he asked, his green eyes alight with excitement.

"There's a policeman here," she gasped out. "I—I told him I was Julie Brewer and he now wants to see my identity card."

A thin smile lit Crane's face.

"Inspector James?"

She nodded, clung to him.

"It's all right," he said, pushing her gently away. "Dont be frightened. I'll fix him." He took out his wallet and produced an identity card. In spite of his apparent confidence, his hand shook. "Here, take this. It's Julie's. I forgot to hand it in. Study it and come in with it. Give me a minute or so to talk to him and then come in. It's going to be all right."

For several seconds Grace stared at the identity card, vaguely aware that Crane had left her and had gone into the sitting-room. She read the particulars on the card: *Brewer, Julia. 47c Hay's Mews, Berkeley Square, Mayfair.*

She waited in the hall, wishing she could hear what was going on in the sitting-room. Richard had said it would be all right. She had implicit faith in him, and when she did enter the sitting-room she was no longer afraid.

Inspector James was standing in the middle of the room. He didn't look at ease and his eyes were embarrassed. Crane was talking to him in his quiet, dry way. His usual humorous expression was missing, and there was a hard look of anger in his eyes.

"Well, we'll say no more about it, Inspector. I think you have exceeded your duty," he was saying, "but I won't take the matter further. Here is Mrs. Brewer's identity card. You'd better look at it or else you'll be conceiving other absurd theories." He turned to Grace. "Show the inspector your identity card, Julie," he said. "Even in this little village there seems to be red tape."

Silently Grace handed the card over and James took it, scarcely appeared to glance at it, handed it back.

"Thank you, ma'am, and please accept my apologies," he said with a rueful smile. "Mr. Crane is annoyed with me and it does appear I've exceeded my duty. But you must forgive an old man, ma'am. Perhaps I am over-curious." He pulled out an enormous gold watch, consulted it, moved to the door. "I'd best be running along," he went on. "My apologies again, sir," he said to Crane, who nodded curtly.

James again looked at the watch, hesitated, looked at Grace. "No ill feelings, ma'am, I hope?" he said.

"Oh, no," Grace whispered, longing for him to go.

"That's very nice of you. Perhaps you'd like to see my watch? It's a collector's piece, so I understand. It not only tells the time

but also the date and it has a very beautiful chime. It belonged to my great-grandfather," James laid the heavy watch in Grace's unwilling hand. "Many people have commented on it. I think you'll agree it's something worth having."

The gold case felt cold and smooth under Grace's touch. She looked at Crane, who had made a slight, warning gesture. She hurriedly handed the watch back to James.

"It's very nice," she said, feeling something was wrong, and puzzled to see how carefully James was holding the watch, gripping it lightly by the ring at its head.

"Very, very nice," he agreed, slipping the watch back into its washleather bag. "Well, I must get along. Please don't bother to see me out. Good day to you both," and he was gone before either of them could make a move.

As the front door shut behind him, Crane took a quick step forward.

"I hope you haven't a prison record," he said quietly. "He's just taken your fingerprints on that watch."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE hands of the little French clock on the mantelpiece crept on towards a quarter to ten. Ellis, his ears pricked, a sick sensation in his stomach, waited with agonized impatience.

What were they doing? Why didn't they come? he asked himself. He had heard the rumbling voice of Inspector James as he entered the bungalow say, "It's most kind of you to let me in, ma'am," and Ellis cursed Grace for being a rash fool. (What was she thinking of, letting this fellow in?) He had heard the sitting-room door close, and then long minutes dragged by in silence, more nerve-racking than sound.

Ellis tried to drag himself upright, but he found he was too weak to do more than raise his head. Never had he felt so helpless and trapped, and sweat ran down his face with the exertion of his fear. Later, he heard the sitting-rrom door open and then close, and he thought the policeman was now certain to come into his room. He pressed himself down in the bed, his lips snarling, his fists clenched, but still nothing happened. A moment later he caught the sound of someone coming up the gravel path outside and heard the front door open. He recognized the step. Crane! he thought feverishly. Now what was going to happen?

Again a long silence, then confused voices in the hall made his heart pound in his throat. He could scarcely believe his ears when he heard James say, "Well, I must be getting along. Please don't bother to see me out. Good day to you both." He wanted to rush to the window to make sure the inspector had really gone, and he cursed his helplessness. Then he heard Crane say to Grace, "I hope

you haven't a prison record. He's just taken your fingerprints on that watch."

So that was it! Ellis raised his clenched fists above his head, his face congested with fury. The stupid little fool had fallen for one of the oldest police tricks in the world. She'd swallowed it hook, line and sinker, and now they were finished—*kaput!* as Hirsch would have said. It would only be a matter of hours before they came back in force, all because that little fool——

He struggled up in bed, the room heaving before his eyes.

"Come in here!" he shouted. "Don't stand out there whispering. Come in here, damn you both!"

There was pause, then the bedroom door opened and Crane came in. Grace, white and terrified, followed him.

"My dear chap, you mustn't excite yourself," Crane said reprovingly. "You're pretty ill, you know."

Ellis snarled at him. "I heard what you said out there," he shouted. "He has her fingerprints, hasn't he?"

The green eyes darkened. "There's no need to get excited about that. They haven't a record of them." Crane glanced at Grace, and a note of doubt crept into his voice. "You said they haven't, didn't you?"

Grace looked beseechingly at Ellis, imploring him to keep silent. "They haven't," she said, her hands unconsciously going to her breasts as if they pained her. "No—they—no, nothing like that."

Ellis studied her, his mind tortured by jealousy. He scarcely recognized the drab, dirty, down-at-the-heel girl who had shared the trench with him, who had sat on the floor crying while she crammed into her mouth the cheap food he had thrown at her. The gingham dress set off her figure, her freshly shampooed hair had golden tints in it. He felt a sickening desire for her, a physical urge he thought he had finished with for good. He was certain now that she had fallen for this rich, well-dressed fop. He had given her clothes, food and shelter, and she was ready to make a prostitute of herself. She was determined that Crane shouldn't know she was a jailbird; so determined that she was prepared to risk the police coming, even if it did mean being caught.

"She's lying," he said. It was a delicious moment for him to be able to explode this ridiculous bubble, to see her change colour, to cringe away from him. He'd teach her to dress up and pose as a great lady. She'd come down again to his level fast enough when Crane knew she was a common thief. "She's just out of prison. She's a pickpocket."

Crane stood still, his head slightly on one side, his eyes dark. There was a long pause, then he said to Grace,"Is that true?"

She began to cry helplessly, her hands covering her face.

"Of course it's true," Ellis said, "the police are looking for her now."

Crane ignored him. He took Grace's hands in his.

"Don't be frightened," he said when she looked up at him. "I'll

help you, only I must know if it's true. Have they anything against you?"

"Go on—lie," Ellis sneered. "Try to make out you're a plaster saint."

Neither of them took any notice of him. The warm, firm flesh of Crane's hands about hers comforted Grace. She nodded dumbly, caught her breath in a rasping sob. "Yes."

Crane made a slight movement, controlled himself. He released Grace's hands, ran his fingers through his straw-coloured hair.

"This is very awkward," he said, and Ellis, who was watching him closely, could see he was frightened.

"Get her out of here," Ellis said. "I want to talk to you."

Grace turned on Ellis.

"No! You'll only tell him lies. You're cruel and hateful. You don't care what happens so long as you're safe. You'll tell him anything to save your skin."

Crane touched her arm. "Please go to your room and wait," he said. "We haven't much time if we're going to get you out of this mess. Please go, and be patient."

"But you don't know him as I do," Grace exclaimed, her voice rising. "He'll tell you lies about me . . ." She stopped abruptly when she saw his look of embarrassment. "All right," she went on, lifting her shoulders hopelessly. "If you don't want to listen to me I'll go." She started to cry again. "I don't care what happens to me! I'm so sick of it all. Nothing ever goes right. I've tried and tried. . . ."

"Get out, you slobbering little slut!" Ellis screamed at her, beside himself with exasperated rage, and he grabbed hold of the bedside lamp and made to fling it at her.

Moving with surprising quickness, Crane snatched the lamp from him and put it down on the table. "Stop that," he said sharply. "You leave her alone."

Grace ran from the room.

"She's in love with you," Ellis said savagely. "Well, you're not having her. She's mine! Do you understand? You keep off. I know what you're planning. Don't you think you're going to do what you like with her—you're not!"

Crane pulled up a chair and sat down close to Ellis.

"Never mind that," he said quietly. "If we're going to help her, we'd better decide at once what to do."

Ellis choked back his rage. There was something in the green eyes that startled him.

"Help her? She's sunk, the fool! What can we do to help her? And remember, she's mine. People don't make mistakes with me. It doesn't pay."

"Who are you, then?" Crane asked, undisguised sarcasm in his voice.

"We're talking about her, not me," Ellis said. "She's a thief. Her name's Grace Clark. She ran away from the W.A.A.F. and served

ten days in Holloway for stealing. She and I hooked up together after I'd saved her from the police. She was stealing from a woman's purse and I saw her do it. The woman caught her, and if it hadn't been for me she'd be in jail by now." He ran his fingers across his sweating face. "She owes me a lot, the ungrateful slut, but I'll fix her if she tries any nonsense with me."

"You really think the inspector was after her fingerprints when he gave her the watch?"

"It's an old trick," Ellis said, sinking back on the pillow. He was feeling exhausted and his fury drained from him reluctantly, leaving him weak and depressed. "She's the kind of dope to fall for an old trick like that. She's fallen for your tricks, too."

"You can leave me out of it," Crane said. "He'll get her fingerprints checked, I suppose. Will that take long?"

Ellis shrugged. "I don't know. They don't waste time. He'll know by to-morrow, that's certain; maybe to-day."

"Unless I get hold of the watch first," Crane said, half to himself.

Ellis stared at him. "You? Why should stick your neck out? And how do you think you can get hold of it?"

"Anything's possible if you try hard enough," Crane said casually. "It'd be no good getting the watch and wiping off the fingerprints unless I replaced the prints with those of some other girl. If I did that, they'd have to give Grace a clean record."

Ellis felt a grudging admiration for this big, fleshy young man.

"That's a smart idea," he said. "You mean you'd try to pull a trick like that?"

Crane nodded. "It's the only way if we're to save her." He looked up slowly, fixing Ellis with his serene green eyes. "And save you, too."

Ellis smiled sneeringly. "They've nothing on me," he said. "It's her they want."

Crane nodded again. "That's fortunate for you." He pulled at his nose, abruptly changed the conversation. "You don't seem to realize how ill you are. You have a temperature of a hundred and four. I think you have pneumonia."

Ellis shrugged impatiently. "I'm tough. I'll get over it."

"She said you wouldn't have a doctor," Crane went on. "All the same I'm calling one whether you like it or not. I don't want you to die here. It'd be too inconvenient."

"I don't want a doctor," Ellis snarled. "I'll get well. It's worry that's making me bad. You and that girl . . . talk . . . talk . . . talk. You won't leave me alone. How can you expect me to get well?"

"You needn't be afraid. This doctor is discreet and he doesn't live in the district. I'll drive over and get him. I'll tell him you're a friend of mine; and he needn't know who you are."

Ellis grunted, watched Crane get to his feet and wander over to the window. Then he stiffened, staring at the broad-shouldered back.

What did he mean? *He needn't know who you are?* What did he mean by that?

"Why shouldn't he know who I am?" Ellis said uneasily. "I told you they haven't anything on me."

"They want you and the girl for robbery. I saw it in the paper as I was coming back from hiding the stretcher. The description of you is unmistakable, and they give her name in full. You hit some old woman."

"I didn't touch her," Ellis said softly. "Grace did it. She was scared; hit her before I could stop her. I can explain everything to the police. She's a jailbird, has a record. She's the one they want: not me."

Crane came to the foot of the bed.

"You interest me because you are so utterly rotten," he said. "It's second nature for you to be rotten, isn't it? Why did you say just now that she's yours? What claim have you to say such a thing?"

"We spent the night together," Ellis said spitefully. "You don't think she's a saint, do you?"

"That doesn't give you a claim on her, and besides I don't believe you."

"Why should I lie to you?" Ellis said angrily. "I'm telling you what happened. She's no saint, and I took her. That makes her mine. Don't you trust me to speak the truth?"

Crane smiled at him.

> *"Treason is but trusted like the fox*
> *Who, ne'er so tame, so cherish'd and locked up,*
> *Will have a wild trick of his ancestors,"*

he quoted, watching Ellis closely.

"Treason?" Ellis repeated, suddenly going cold.

"Shakespeare can rise to every occasion with a fitting phrase," Crane said, walking to the door. "We'll have another little chat before long. Now, I have things to do."

"Treason?" Ellis said again, refusing to believe that Crane knew. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't you?" Crane said quietly. "You're Edwin Cushman, the traitor. I think you made a mistake when you said the police haven't anything on you. They have enough to hang you, Cushman, and that seems a lot to me." He smiled again and left the room.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ELLIS now paid no heed to the bustling tick of the French clock on the mantelpiece. Time stood still for him. He lay in the bed, his head hot, his mind paralysed with alarm, his body seeming to be no part of him.

Crane knew! That was all he could think about. Crane knew he was Cushman. Crane and he were the only two men alive who knew that, and what, he kept asking himself, was Crane going to do about it?

"We'll have another little chat before long," he had said, that odd look in his strange green eyes. What had he in mind?

Ellis squirmed further down in the bed. There was no way out. He was helpless, and although alone, unguarded, able even to look out of an open window, he was a prisoner, chained to the bed by his broken leg. Crane could do what he liked with him, blackmail him, hand him over to the police—anything. But would a man of his education and wealth take advantage of such an opportunity? "It's the only way if we're to save her; and save you too," he had said. Did he intend to help them escape? If so—why? What was going on in the fellow's mind? What was he planning?

Ellis cursed feverishly as he tried to solve that puzzle, and the hands of the little French clock moved slowly forward.

There was something about this big, fleshy fellow that Ellis couldn't fathom. He was so quiet, calm, deliberate, and yet every now and then he showed fear . . . the kind of fear that Ellis understood, furtive, painfully concealed fear that only betrayed itself by the shaking of his hands, the darkening of his eyes.

Why was he frightened? If Ellis could find that out he would have a weapon with which to protect himself. If Crane had done something wrong and Ellis could find out what it was then he might still hold the whip hand.

Realizing that this was a possible way out, Ellis shouted for Grace, then, snarling with disappointed fury, he remembered she could not hear him, so he waited for her, his body tense with suppressed excitement and exasperation.

A few minutes past noon—Crane had been away over an hour and a half—the bedroom door opened and Grace came in. In spite of her white face and red-rimmed eyes she looked attractive, and Ellis wanted to drag her on the bed beside him, to hold her down, to feel her breath against his face and the movement of her body against his as she struggled to get away.

"Do you want anything to eat?" Grace asked, standing at the foot of the bed, well away from him.

"Eat?" he snarled furiously. "Of course I don't. Don't you think of anything but stuffing yourself? Come here, I want to talk to you."

Grace didn't move. She folded her hands in front of her, an obstinate expression in her eyes. Ellis was dismayed to see this change in her. Up to now he had thought of her as a being without spirit, a drudge to obey his orders, someone he could trample on, snap his fingers at, to treat as he liked. But seeing her now, she seemed a new person, someone with confidence and authority.

"What do you want?" she asked, looking straight at him.

"You're a rotten little thief," he said viciously. "Just because

you've togged yourself up like that you needn't put on airs. When they get you into prison, they'll soon knock the starch . . ."

"If that's all you have to say, I'll go," Grace interrupted.

If only he could reach her, Ellis thought, livid with rage. How dare a slut like her interrupt him when he was speaking? Hadn't he held forty million people—more, probably—spellbound night after night while he talked to them on the air? And this little chit, because she had on a decent dress, dared to interrupt him. If he could get his hands on her he'd tear the dress off her back, he'd drag her round the room by her hair, he'd . . .

"And don't look at me like that," Grace said firmly. "I don't like it. You're like a wild beast."

'Wait!' Ellis said to himself, 'she's useful now, but a time will come when I'll even things up.'

He closed his eyes for a moment, his thin spiteful face relaxing.

"I'm ill," he muttered. "You don't consider me. My leg hurts and my head aches, and now you're calling me a wild beast."

Grace remembered his steel-like fingers on her throat and was not impressed with this new whining attitude. She stayed where she was, ready to run from the room.

He opened his eyes again, scowled at her.

"Well, sit down if you won't come near me. I don't like seeing you standing like that as if you want to run away."

"What do you want?" she said without moving.

He again had to control himself. His fingers itched to grab her, to wreak his rage on her.

"This chap Crane," he said. "I don't trust him. There's something fishy about him."

He saw the expression in her eyes change from obstinacy to hostility.

"He's kind," she said. "That's something you wouldn't understand."

"I don't trust him," he repeated, trying to keep the edge of his temper out of his voice. "He's playing a deep game. Why should he help us? Have you thought of that? He's risking a prison sentence for what he's doing for us. Why? Ask yourself. What's going on in his mind?"

Grace smiled. It was a secret, complacent smile that startled Ellis. "You judge others by yourself," she said softly. "He's kind. That's why he's helping us."

"Don't talk like a fool," Ellis grated. "He's got a plan. There's something behind it all. He's frightened of something. Haven't you seen the way his hands shake and that funny look in his eyes? I don't like his eyes . . . they're cat's eyes . . . as if he could see in the dark. And who is he? How did he get his money? Why does he live alone?"

"I don't know," Grace said firmly, aware that at the back of her mind, doubt was assailing her loyalty. She remembered the look of

terror on Crane's face when he had seen her in that dress. *I thought it was Julie. . . .* Well, she wasn't going to tell Ellis that. It wasn't his business.

"A man as rich as he would have servants," Ellis went on, "but he lives alone. And that dress. He gave it to you, didn't he?"

"It's his sister's," Grace said sharply. "She's dead."

Ellis chewed his lower lip, thought. Now he was learning something.

"Sister?" he repeated, "I wonder. Who was she?"

"His sister, I tell you," Grace snapped. "Why must you go on and on? It's no business of yours."

"You stick up for him, don't you?" he sneered, "But I don't trust him. There's something fishy . . ."

"Oh, be quiet," Grace broke in, and moved forward impatiently. She came within Ellis's reach, and moving like a striking snake, he grabbed hold of her wrist.

She pulled back, her eyes wide with fear, but somehow, although he was so weak and his head seemed to burst with the effort of moving, he hung on to her, his lips off his teeth.

"You're in love with him, aren't you, you poor fool," he gasped, dragging her slowly towards him.

"Let me go!" she cried, hitting at his hand, but he hung on, until his free hand caught the skirt of her frock.

"I'll tear it off you if you struggle," he said. "I mean it."

She allowed him to pull her right up to him, her eyes dark with alarm, her face white.

"Leave me alone," she exclaimed. "Let go of me."

"Sit down," he returned, his thin, claw-like hand twisted in the skirt of her frock. "It'll rip right off you if I pull."

She sat on the edge of the bed close to him.

"Just because he's given you a dress you think he's marvellous," Ellis said. "Don't be a fool. There's something behind all this. I know. I'm sure of it. He wouldn't do this unless he's going to get something out of it. Why is he frightened? What's he hiding? You've got to find out before he comes back. Search the place. Look into his desk. Read his letters. We've got to know what's behind all this. Do it now. You'll find something: letters . . . anything might tell us if you look hard enough."

"But I couldn't," she said, shocked. "I couldn't do that. It's his house . . . he's been kind . . ."

"Stop saying he's been kind. No one's kind these days unless they have an iron in the fire. You've got to do it, otherwise we're sunk. Go on. Look in his bedroom. You'll find something there."

"Not after what he's done for us," Grace said. "I wouldn't do it. It's prying. . . ."

Ellis tightened his grip on her skirt. "You're a thief," he said. "Why should you care? Go through his drawers. You might find something worth stealing."

Scarlet, Grace lifted her hand and smacked his face. It was a

sharp, hard blow, making Ellis's eyes water. For a second he relaxed his grip and in that moment she had sprung away. She leaned against the wall, and they looked at each other, she angry and frightened; he vicious, startled.

"You'll be sorry for that," he said, his hand on his cheek. "Hitting a sick man! I gave you food, didn't I? I saved you from the police. And you hit me. I expected at least a little gratitude."

Grace wrung her hands. "I'm sorry," she said tearfully. "I shouldn't have done it but you say such cruel, beastly things. You deserved it, but I shouldn't have hit you when you're so ill. I'm truly sorry. . . ."

"Never mind," Ellis said limply, sensing her mood was weakening. "Go to his room and look in his drawers. I'm not thinking of myself, I'm thinking of you. He may have a plan to hurt you."

"He hasn't!" Grace said. "And I'm not going to do it."

"You believe in him, don't you?" Ellis went on. "Well, prove he's all right. If you find nothing suspicious in his room then I'll believe, like you, he's being kind, and is a fine man. I'll even apologize for thinking badly of him. That's fair, isn't it? Just prove it to me."

"I know there'll be nothing," Grace said, weakening. "And besides I can't go into his room. It's not right. . . ."

"If you're so sure there's nothing, then what are you hesitating for?" Ellis asked, watching her closely. "But you know as well as I do that something is wrong with the chap, only you're soft about him. You're like an ostrich sticking its head in the sand. If you're so sure, go to his room and see."

"Then I will," Grace exclaimed. "I'll prove it to you. There's nothing wrong . . . it's only your beastly, suspicious mind," and she ran from the room, slamming the door behind her.

It took her several minutes to find Crane's room. She found it at last at the far end of the long passage that ran the length of the bungalow. It was a big room, with a large bay window overlooking the garden. It was the kind of room she expected him to have: the divan bed was covered with a black and gold bedspread, the furniture was light oak and the fitted carpet was wine colour.

She stood in the doorway, looking round, feeling a sudden weakness in her limbs, and she thought perhaps someday she might sleep in here: share this luxury with him.

Timidly, yet with eager excitement, she entered the room, leaving the door open, and crossed the thick pile carpet to the chest of drawers. She hesitated before pulling open one of the drawers. She had tried to convince Ellis and herself that it was wrong to pry into Crane's things, and yet she wanted to. She wanted to handle his clothes, see everything that was his in the hope that a closer contact might be established between them.

The top drawer contained handkerchiefs and shirts, neatly arranged in tidy layers, and she touched them gently, again feeling weakness in her limbs.

She experienced great pleasure and satisfaction in looking at his belongings, and she went through each drawer, finding only an expensive and luxurious collection of clothes.

She went from the chest of drawers to the fitted wardrobe. There she found suits, overcoats, hats, ties, shoes: all expensive, all nearly new. The dressing table had two drawers to it, and she went quickly to it, anxious to get back to Ellis and tell him how wrong he had been.

She slid open one of the drawers, paused, looked down at a long, thin knife with a white bone handle which lay in the otherwise empty drawer. It was a cruel-looking knife, very sharp and deadly, and the narrow blade was stained red: a rusty red that she instinctively knew was blood.

She stepped back with a little cry, and stood staring at the knife for a long time, scarcely daring to think what it was doing in the drawer; then with a violent shudder, she closed the drawer. As she did so, she caught sight of Crane in the mirror. He was standing in the doorway watching her. She didn't move or make a sound, but stared at his reflection, her heart bumping against her ribs, her mouth dry. There was a queer, lop-sided smile on his face that frightened her.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE fat little Hindu came into the room so silently that Ellis was not aware that he had entered until he happened to look up and found him standing at his side.

For a moment Ellis thought that the sad-looking little man was a hallucination, then realizing that he wasn't, he started violently, his face revealing his fear.

"I am Dr. Safki," the little man said in a soft, sibilant voice. "I'm sorry if I startled you."

For a moment or so Ellis could only think of Crane. If this nigger was the doctor then Crane must be back and had probably caught Grice prying in his room. At that moment Crane came into the room. He seemed quite at ease although Ellis thought his face was a shade paler (or was it a trick of the sunlight?). He came to the foot of the bed, smiled at Ellis.

"Dr. Safki will fix you up," he said. "You can have every confidence in him. He's an extremely clever fellow."

Ellis looked at the Hindu. The big, moist, bloodshot eyes were sad, the small sensual mouth was sulky, and the fat, knobbly little chin weak: not a man to inspire confidence, Ellis thought, but he was feeling too ill to worry about such trifles. The fact that the fellow was black gave him an inward satisfaction. He felt superior, patronizing. After all, these blackies hadn't earned the right to civilization, he argued. They were parrots, merely imitating the white man, without an original idea in their thick skulls.

Dr. Safki had taken Ellis's wrist, his little fingers pressed the pounding pulse. There was a sharp acid smell coming from the doctor which repelled Ellis. Then the doctor released Ellis's wrist, took his stethoscope from an inside pocket, hung it round his neck.

"If you'll just open your pyjama jacket," the soft voice murmured.

Ellis undid the buttons. Where was Grace? he thought. What had happened to her? Had Crane caught her in his room? Was that why he was looking so pale?

The cold little funnel of the stethoscope rested on his thin chest, moved, stopped, moved again.

The greasy, bullet-shaped head, smelling of a sickly perfume, was within a few inches of Ellis's nose. He noticed the doctor was suffering from dandruff. *Physician heal thyself,* he thought, and suddenly giggled.

The unexpected sound made Crane start. Dr. Safki sighed, said gently, "Please don't do that; it disturbs my diagnosis."

Ellis, flushing angrily, controlled himself. What was the matter with him? He must be light-headed—worse than he thought. He glared at the black, greasy hair, wanting to push the head away, curse at them both; be rid of them.

Dr. Safki stood back, his moon-shaped face impassive. He folded his stethoscope, put it away. His starched cuffs rattled as he moved his hands.

"Now I think I would like to look at your leg," he said and pulled down the blankets, revealing Ellis's stunted body in the fine black and gold pyjamas.

Crane was standing by the window, his back half turned, staring out into the garden. Ellis eyed the tremendous width of shoulders—a dangerous customer, he thought, and remembered Scragger. Scragger had shoulders like Crane, but Ellis would back Scragger in a fight with Crane. Scragger knew all the tricks; he'd been reared in a tough school, not like this fop whose background was luxury and lavender water.

The blankets were gently replaced.

"The leg looks excellent," Dr. Safki murmured. "A beautiful piece of work. I won't disturb the splints."

Ellis suddenly had an extraordinary feeling of emotion: the girl was clever. She had done a lot for him. It wasn't her fault that she had fallen for this rich playboy. A girl of her education and background was easy meat to a man like Crane.

"You have a remarkable resistance," Dr. Safki was saying. "By rights you should be desperately ill. Mind you, I'm not saying you're out of the wood—you're not, but you're doing quite well considering everything." He opened the black morocco bag he had brought with him, put a bottle of tablets on the bedside table. "Take one of these every two hours. You'll be better by to-morrow. I'll see you again."

Ellis nodded bleakly, looked at Crane who was moving away from the window.

"That's fine," Crane said. "Thank you so much." He went with the little Hindu to the door.

Dr. Safki paused, looked at Ellis.

"You're a very silent young man," he said. "Haven't you anything to say for yourself at all?"

Ellis pursed his thin lips, looked away.

"He's shy," Crane said and suddenly laughed. "I believe he has an acute inferiority complex."

Dr. Safki nodded. "Ah!" he said. "Yes, I can understand that. Each of us has his own traitor within. Extravagance is my traitor."

"And you know mine," Crane said, his eyes suddenly odd.

"Yes, I know yours," Dr. Safki returned, and a for a brief moment disgust showed on his face. Ellis, who was watching him, noticed the change of expression. He knows, he thought. There is something fishy going on and this nigger knows what it is.

Crane laughed lightly. He seemed now completely at ease. "Well, we mustn't keep you, Doctor, no doubt you have things to do. Come and see him to-morrow. Perhaps he'll say something then. He has a remarkable voice," and he laughed again.

Ellis gritted his teeth. A furious hatred for this big, handsome fellow boiled up inside him.

Dr. Safki nodded. "I'll come," he said, and to Ellis, "You mustn't excite yourself. If you want to get well quickly you should relax and not worry about anything."

"Difficult advice to carry out," Crane said, looking at Ellis with a friendly smile. "But doctors are all the same. They give advice so easily although I don't really believe they expect you to carry it out. It's just something to soothe their own conscience." He patted Safki's plump little arm. "And some doctors have the most peculiar consciences, haven't they, my friend?"

"It is very probable," the doctor returned, looking sad again, and he went out of the room, Crane following him.

Grace was waiting in the hall. She looked quickly at the two men as they came towards her, looked away as she met Crane's quiet, calm gaze.

"Is this the young lady who set his leg?" Dr. Safki murmured.

"That's right," Crane said. "I'd like you to meet Dr. Safki," he went on to Grace. "You'll be glad to hear that our friend is not as ill as we thought. Doctor thinks he'll pull through, and has admired the brilliant way you set his leg." He touched Dr. Safki's arm. "This is Julie Brewer."

Dr. Safki, up to this moment, was looking at Grace with interested, kindly eyes. He admired her so respectfully that Grace, in spite of her nervousness, felt flattered, but when Crane said, "this is Julie Brewer," the little man stepped back abruptly and his coffee-coloured skin turned pale. He looked at Grace, at Crane, then muttering something under his breath, walked to the front door,

opened it and without looking back went hurriedly down the long drive.

Grace and Crane stood for a moment staring after him, then Crane shrugged.

"Funny little man . . . I don't think he really cares for women," and he moved to Grace, stood before her and looked into her eyes.

"Now let's talk," he said. "Shall we go into the sitting-room?"

She walked ahead of him, and they sat down in armchairs opposite each other.

"He told you to search my room, didn't he?" Crane asked.

She shuddered. "I shouldn't have done it," she said. "Oh, I wish now I hadn't. . . ."

"But he told you to do it?" he asked again, as if anxious that she should excuse herself.

"Yes."

Crane nodded. "Well, don't worry. You mustn't think I'm angry. I'm not. Some people make a great fuss about their privacy, but I don't. At least, perhaps that's not quite true. I wouldn't like everyone to know what you found in that drawer."

Grace recoiled. "Please . . . don't speak about it."

"I want to speak about it. I feel, now you've seen it, you must have an explanation. Otherwise you might think I'm a murderer or something equally dreadful."

"Of course I don't," Grace blurted out, wringing her hands. "I had no business to pry. . . ."

"You know nothing about me, do you?" Crane said, leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs, "and yet I feel you don't dislike me."

"I—I'm very grateful to you. . . ." Grace stammered.

"Only grateful?" There was an encouraging smile in his eyes. "Nothing more than gratitude? You know, I hate gratitude; it's like pity."

"You've been so kind to me," Grace said, her face scarlet. "I—I—of course I like you."

"But only because I've been kind to you? Not for myself?" He got up and went to her, offering her his hand.

She sat still, staring at the big, fleshy hand, ill at ease, and yet weak with physical excitement.

"I want you to like me," he said gently. "Because I like you. I think you have courage; and besides, you're pretty. I like the way you walk, the way you hold your head, the way you look at me. It's extraordinary. The moment I saw you . . . frightened . . . alone in the clubhouse . . . you interested me very much."

Grace slid her hand into his. She scarcely knew what she was doing. It had happened, as she had hoped it would happen. He was making love to her.

"Oh, I do like you," she said.

The warm, strong hand pressed hers, and then he moved away from her.

"I'm glad you said that," he said, leaning against the mantelpiece. "Now, I feel I can talk to you not as a stranger but as a friend. I know that knife gave you a shock—my sister killed herself with it."

"Oh!" Grace stiffened, her hands gripping the arms of the chair. "How awful . . . how dreadful for you."

He moved restlessly. "It was pretty awful," he said. "You see we meant a lot to each other. We'd grown up together, lived here together, shared things together. She was part of my life." He turned abruptly and wandered across the room to the window. She watched him and for several minutes he kept his back turned, then as abruptly he came back. "I haven't really got over it yet," he said, running his fingers through his straw-coloured hair. "Forgive me if I am a little emotional. She was a lovely person and my only real friend." He broke off, stared at Grace. "You remind me of her. The moment I saw you . . ."

Grace couldn't find words to express what she was feeling. She wanted to cry, to go to him and hold him in her arms, to tell him how sorry she was for him and that she would do anything to help him, but she was tongue-tied and said nothing.

"She married a chap who turned out to be a first-class swine," Crane went on. "I won't go into details; they're too revolting to talk about. She left him on their wedding night and came to live with me, but the damage was done. She couldn't clear her mind of his beastliness and the poor kid went off her head. I kept her here for a month, not telling anyone but Safki—he was splendid and helped me no end—and we hoped she'd get well. She didn't . . . she killed herself." He drew in a quick breath, beat his fist on the mantelpiece. "It was horrible. Can you blame me for wanting to hush it all up? She had so many friends and I couldn't bear the thought of the whispering campaign that would have been inevitable if I'd reported her death to the police. Safki gave the death certificate—natural causes, and no one knows the truth. I'm sorry you saw the knife. It's lain in that drawer for months. I've not had the nerve to touch it, and I've never been to the drawer since it happened." He felt in his hip pocket, pulled out a gold cigarette case, lit a cigarette, tossed the match into the fireplace. "Well, now you know. You and Safki are the only two people, except myself, who do know. Will you keep my secret?"

"Oh, yes," Grace said, her eyes filling with tears. "Of course I will. I can't say how sorry I am. I'll never forgive myself for going into your room, but he kept on and on . . ."

"He doesn't like me, does he?" Crane said, his eyes watchful.

"No. He says there's something about you . . . he doesn't trust you. . . ."

"But you do, don't you?"

"Yes. I knew there was nothing . . ."

"I'm lonely," Crane broke in abruptly. "You don't know how lonely I am. There's no one for me to talk to now. No one who really

understands me. She was always with me and now . . ." He lifted his shoulders. "I'm glad you have her room. You don't know how much you remind me of her."

"I'm glad," Grace said, not sure that this was true. Did he like her only because she reminded him of his dead sister? Wasn't there something of her own self that he liked?

"Come on," he said, going to the door. "Let's talk to Ellis. I have other things to tell you, and he must know too. I've been busy."

As she came to the door, he put his hand on her shoulder.

"You haven't even asked about the watch. You don't think of yourself, do you?"

"What do I matter?" Grace said. "I'm nobody. I've never been anybody. . . ."

"But wouldn't you like to be?" Crane said, smiling at her. "Have you ever thought of running a place like this? Having money to spend, finding a little happiness."

She stared at him, her eyes wide with delighted surprise.

"Oh, yes," she said.

"Well, sometimes dreams do come true," he said gently, "but now let's go and see Ellis."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

By six o'clock, the evening sun seemed to gather strength and a shimmering heat lay over the garden. From his bed Ellis could see the hard black shadows of the trees on the lawn, sharp-edged and still. The colours of the flowers had taken on a new vividness in the blaze of light and the sky was cloudless, like an azure umbrella.

Ellis had been alone for three hours. Every so often he heard Grace and Crane talking in the garden, and twice he had caught a glimpse of them as they walked up and down the lawn, close together, she looking up at him so that she could read the words as they formed on his lips. But for over an hour now he had seen nothing of them and he wondered anxiously where they were and what they were doing.

The tablets given him by Dr. Safki had eased his fever, and he found himself clearer in mind; his sense of self-preservation sharpened. He was able to appreciate his position: one of danger and uncertainty, depending on how Crane was going to react.

Ellis was glad of the opportunity to lie quiet and make plans; to consider what best to do.

Crane had handled the fingerprint business with brilliant audacity. Although he had only given them the sketchiest idea of what he had done Ellis gathered that Crane was friendly with Inspector James's daughter. Apparently Crane's influence was considerable, and he had been able to persuade her to get hold of the watch, to wipe it clean of fingerprints and to substitute her own prints on it in the place of Grace's. She had done this apparently

without asking for an explanation, and Crane hadn't said what reward he had given her for taking such a risk. He merely said, perhaps a little mysteriously, "she's in my debt and I knew I could rely on her. It was really very simple. So now neither of you have anything to worry about. I know James. When he receives the report from headquarters that the fingerprints on the watch are not recorded he'll drop the whole business. He is a man who lives by rule of thumb, and he has great faith in reports. You can both stay here as long as you like."

So the immediate danger seemed over, but Ellis was not satisfied. Crane had said nothing to him about his own future, nor had he again referred to the fact that he knew Ellis was Cushman. He had kept away from Ellis, talking to him only in Grace's presence. Ellis felt that Crane had something up his sleeve and was biding his time. It was an uncomfortable feeling; it worried Ellis.

There was no mistake about it: Crane was a smooth card. The way he had handled the inspector's daughter showed that. Even Ellis wasn't capable of such finesse and cunning, and he prided himself on being smart.

Then there was Grace. The change in her during the day had been nothing short of miraculous. She had suddenly become pretty, her eyes bright where before they had been lustreless and miserable. The new clothes made a tremendous difference to her, and Ellis couldn't keep her out of his mind, picturing her as she lay on the bed beside him, pinned down by his hand on her throat. He found himself wanting to see her again, watching the clock impatiently, wondering how much longer she was going to be before she came to see if he wanted anything.

There was no doubt that she had been good to him. Not many girls could have set his leg as she had done: why even that fat little nigger of a doctor had been impressed.

Ellis thought back to the moment when he had decided to save her from arrest: when she had been stealing from the woman's purse and had been caught. He had had a feeling then that her destiny was to be linked with his. Instinctively he had known that she would be worth helping, and that she would repay his help a hundred times over. He was lonely, had need of a companion and had thought at first that he had been landed with a gutless, snivelling little bitch, but he had been wrong; had misjudged her. The caterpillar had turned into a butterfly: the transformation was electrifying.

Ellis frowned. Was he falling in love with the girl? he asked himself. Always coldly analytical of his own feelings, he pondered the question. It was possible. Hate, they say, is akin to love, he thought, and he had treated her brutally enough; even hated her. Now his feelings were changing. It was an odd sensation for a man of his callousness and brutality to be moved by a chit of a girl like Grace, and yet he was moved; he could not deny it. It would be nice, he thought, if she came in now and was kind to him. He didn't want

a lot of slop; that was something he couldn't stomach, but he would have liked her to sit by the window and talk to him. He didn't care what she said; she was so illiterate that she couldn't possibly interest him no matter what she had to say, but he wanted to hear the sound of her voice, to look at her, to have her near him.

He moved restlessly. She was in love with Crane. Anyone with half an eye could see that. Crane with his good looks, his wealth, his suave manners was just the kind of fellow a girl like Grace would fall for. It was natural. She was young, frivolous, without standards, educated by the movies; what could one expect? That didn't matter, Ellis decided, so long as Crane didn't interest himself in her. There lay the danger. If Crane behaved as he should behave, he'd quickly put her in her place. But if he happened to be interested in women (and a big, fleshy fellow like him was certain to be over-sexed, Ellis thought bitterly), then there was danger; although, he argued, reluctant to face up to the more likely possibilities, a fellow like Crane would surely surround himself with fashionable beauties, the kind of women you see in *Vogue,* showing off clothes (and themselves too, for that matter!). Crane could get chorus girls down from London, fast bits from the West End hotels who were not above selling themselves for a good time: the real stuff; women who knew what was what, knew how to dress, how to please men, not a deaf little stupid like Grace.

But Grace suited Ellis. Oddly enough, he decided, she was his type of girl. He hadn't ever thought of having a girl before, but now he considered the idea he decided Grace was the one for him.

But Crane—Crane kept cropping up in his thoughts. Surely a fellow like Crane wouldn't bother with Grace? But suppose he did? Suppose he was one of those swine who thought it fun to take on a girl as innocent and naïve as Grace? There were such men. Suppose Crane was one of them? Suppose at this very moment he was trying it on? Ellis felt sweat on his face. He'd kill him! He half sat up in bed, then with a gesture of frustrated fury, he lay back again. It was all very well to think of killing Crane, but how to do it? He was half Crane's size and, besides, he was chained to the bed. It wouldn't be easy. It'd need thought.

Then perhaps there would be no need to kill Crane. There was no point in working one's self up if Crane was not interested in Grace. No point at all. He'd wait and see; watch Crane.

It was after seven o'clock before Grace and Crane returned to the bungalow. He heard the front door close, and Crane say something in a low voice. Grace laughed; the sound of her laughter was to Ellis like the touch of a hot iron. He squirmed in the bed, the whole of his mean little mind writhing with jealousy. He waited, listening, willing them to come to him, but they didn't, and a moment later, he heard another door close and then a long silence brooded over the place.

He lay still, his eyes on the clock, miserable, lonely, waiting for them to come. 'I'm ill,' he thought, 'and in pain, and they don't

give a damn. They haven't thought of me all the afternoon. I might have needed something, but they're too wrapped up in themselves to bother about me. You wouldn't treat a sick dog as they're treating me.'

When the hands of the clock crept round to half-past seven, he heard Grace's light tread and then the door opened.

He was about to complain, to abuse her for neglecting him, but the angry, bitter words died in his throat. He scarcely recognized her as she stood in the doorway, her face flushed, her eyes bright with suppressed excitement. She had on a wine-coloured dress, the skirt of which reached to the floor in full, graceful lines, and was cut low on her shoulders, revealing her creamy white skin that stirred him more than he had ever been stirred before in his life. Her hair was dressed in an upsweep, and a collar of gleaming diamonds glittered at her throat.

This was a new Grace: a glamorous woman, the sight of whom drove Ellis into a frenzy of jealousy and alarm. He realized that dressed as she was, looking as she did, she was a woman whom Crane could love; she no longer looked the naïve, stupid little half-wit he had known twenty-four hours ago. She was something: the real stuff. A woman to excite the worst in any man.

"Do you like me?" she said with an excited giggle. "He made me dress like this. He's ever so kind. Look at these diamonds. They're real. Honest! They're real diamonds. Aren't they wonderful?"

Still Ellis could say nothing. He stared at her, feeling a hungry longing for her, an overwhelming need to have her for himself.

"I thought you'd be surprised," she went on, delighted to see his obviously bewildered expression. "I scarcely believed it was me when I looked in the mirror."

Then he saw through the glamour, saw her innocence and he knew instinctively that she was in danger. Crane had designs on her. He must have. He wouldn't have dressed her up like this, given her diamonds unless he meant her harm.

He found himself in despair that he might lose her, and he forgot about himself, forgot his pain and that he would hang if the police caught him; all he could think of was her: to open her eyes to her danger; to convince her that Crane was not kind but cunning and dangerous. (And Crane had dared to call him a fox! *Treason is but trusted like a fox.* He had said that, but what of him? He was to be trusted even less.)

"Come here," Ellis said, struggling to speak calmly. "I wouldn't have believed you were the same girl."

Grace moved into the room. The long dress gave her poise, and she moved smoothly as if she was being drawn along on wheels. She stood by his bed and looked down at him. He realized bitterly that she was not thinking of him. She was only thinking of herself, coming to him because there was no one else in the bungalow to whom she could show herself off.

"So he gave you those diamonds?" he said slowly, his eyes watchful and hurt.

"Isn't he kind?" she said happily. "Of course they're only lent to me. They belonged to his sister, Julie . . . the one who died."

Without knowing why, Ellis felt a cold wave of fear run down his spine.

The one who died. . . . Why should those words strike fear into him? It was as if he were suddenly able to look into the future, to see danger for her, and for a brief moment, he fancied a shadow lay between them: something tangible, black and frightening, and he struggled up in bed, pointing at her.

"Be careful you don't die too," he said. "He means you no good. I know it. You're mad to accept things from him." Then suddenly, still not thinking of himself, he jerked out, "Go! Leave me. Get out of here before it's too late. Do you hear? Get out of those things and go!"

She stared at him, shocked by his frightened eyes and the despair on his face.

"Don't stand gaping at me," he exclaimed, beating his fist on the eiderdown. "Get out and save yourself! He'll harm you. I know he will. There's something about him. He's devilish . . . He broke off as he saw Crane standing in the doorway, smiling, but his eyes dark.

"What an odd word to use—devilish," Crane said, looking at Ellis, who glared back at him. "You mustn't frighten the poor girl." He wandered into the room and stood beside Grace who looked up at him, her eyes worried, her face a little pale. "Doesn't she look nice?" he went on, smiling at her. Watching them, Ellis saw Grace's face light up when Crane smiled at her, and the worried expression went from her eyes.

Ellis could think of nothing to say, and after the first glance, he could no longer bear to look at them. He stared out of the window, his fists clenched, his face a hard mask of misery.

"How have you been getting on?" Crane asked cheerfully. "Is there anything I can bring you . . . a book perhaps?"

"Get out!" Ellis snarled at him. "Leave me alone."

"Funny chap, isn't he?" Crane said to Grace, leading her to the door. "We'll get him some supper. Perhaps that'll sweeten his temper." His hand rested on Grace's bare arm. "Shall we tell him?" he went on, pulling her against him.

Grace broke free and went quickly from the room. Ellis did not see her face, but he knew she was confused and shy. He had, however, seen with sick horror, Crane's familiar caress.

Crane glanced at Ellis, a sudden shifty expression in his eyes. "We're celebrating to-night," he said, and added as he was about to leave the room, "I'm opening a bottle of pop. You must congratulate me. Grace has promised to be my wife."

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

EXCEPT for the blue-painted lamp over the entrance and the blue and white sign: *Police* on the gate, the Taleham Police Station looked what it was: an old world cottage.

The front room had been converted into the office (much against Mrs. James's wishes) and the rest of the house was given over to the inspector, his wife and daughter, Daphne, for their living quarters.

Police Constable George Rogers was seated on the hard Windsor chair before the inspector's desk. In half an hour's time he was due for his evening patrol; he was not looking forward to bicycling along the hot, dusty lanes, a task he undertook, winter and summer, wet or fine, twice daily. It was always an uneventful trip and he had long lost his first enthusiastic ambitions to make an arrest, catch a poacher or even rescue a beautiful young lady from assault. He was only too anxious to get the patrol over and return to the station. For two years (ever since he had had the good fortune to be sent to Taleham) Rogers had adored Daphne James from afar. He was prepared to admit to his more intimate friends that he was scared of her, but that did not alter the fact that he was head over heels in love with her. In his most pessimistic moments he realized that Daphne would never be his. He knew he wasn't in her class. For that matter no one in the village was in her class except, of course, the gentry. She was as out of place in Taleham as an orchid on a coster barrow. She wasn't meant for village life and she was always telling him so. She had the looks and the figure for the stage, the films—Hollywood.

Rogers knew she was friendly with Crane. Now Crane was the kind of bloke you'd expect Daphne to be friendly with, Rogers had reasoned time and again. Crane had a big 38 h.p. Buick, a luxuriously furnished home; he dressed well, had the right manners, and plenty of money.

But that didn't prevent Rogers from loving Daphne, and at this moment, he was listening to the sound of her voice as she talked to her mother in the kitchen.

The heavy clump of the inspector's boots coming along the passage aroused Rogers, and he hurriedly crossed over to his own little desk that stood in the draughtiest corner of the room.

The door opened and James came in. He carried a small despatch case that had been delivered but a moment ago from Headquarters.

"I must say these fellows are quick," he said grudgingly as he sat at his desk. "Quicker than when I was a young man. A bit slap-

dash, of course, but that's to be expected. Everything's a bit slap-dash these days."

Rogers grunted. He'd heard all this before and wasn't interested.

"Got your watch back, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, it's back," James said. He pulled at his moustache, frowned. "They have no record of the fingerprints. It's the first time I've tried that little dodge it's failed. Well, it just shows you." He looked up and fixed Rogers with his piercing blue eyes. "Let this be a lesson to you, my lad. Never tamper with the gentry, and the next time you think a young lady friend of Mr. Crane is a wrong 'un, I'll thank you to keep the information to yourself."

"Very good, sir," Rogers said, and hid a grin. He knew that James had also suspected Grace, and was disappointed that the trap he had sprung had come to nothing.

James pawed over the contents of the despatch case.

"Now what have they got here to worry me?" he muttered, took up a printed sheet of paper to which a photograph was pinned. He studied the paper for some time, then put it thoughtfully back on his desk. "Now here's a strange coincidence; a very strange coincidence if you like," he said, taking out his pipe and looking at it gloomily. He caught Rogers's eye. "I'll trouble you for a fill of tobacco. A young fellow like you shouldn't smoke so much. You'd better wait until you're my age before you ruin your wind. You never know when you'll have to use it."

Rogers was used to handing over his tobacco pouch. He pushed it across the inspector's desk. "What's the strange coincidence, sir?" he asked.

"This 'ere," James said, tapping the printed sheet of paper. He took the pouch and began to fill his pipe. "Now this only goes to show how careful you have to be. The London police are looking for a young woman, aged twenty-two, medium height, brown hair and eyes, stone deaf, lip reads well, has served ten days for stealing, and is now wanted in connection with a further theft and as an accomplice in a crime of violence."

Rogers pulled at his thick nose. "Stone deaf and lip reads, eh?" he said. "Got 'er photograph there, sir?"

Silently James handed it over and as silently Rogers studied it.

"I know what you're thinking, my lad, but you're wrong," James said evenly. "You're thinking this Mrs. Brewer and this Grace Clark are one and the same. Now, admit it. That's how your mind's working, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't say that, sir," Rogers said cautiously, "but like you, I'd say it's a very strange coincidence."

"And so it is," James returned. "What do you think of the photograph?"

"I would have said it was the same girl if you hadn't proved different," Rogers returned. "You're sure about that watch?"

"The only thing I'm sure about in these difficult days is that I like to hear a young police officer say 'sir' when speaking to hi

superiors," James returned acidly and took the photograph from Rogers to study it again.

"Yes, sir," Rogers said, unabashed. He had worked with James now for two years and knew his bark was a lot worse than his bite. In fact, he liked James, admired him, would have liked him for a father-in-law, although he had been discreet enough not to let James have an inkling of any of these facts.

"Yes, I'm sure about the watch," James said slowly; "and what's more, I'd have said it was the same girl myself if I didn't know better. It just goes to prove how careful a policeman has to be."

"You're quite sure about the fingerprints, sir?" Rogers persisted.

"I'm sure the young lady handled the watch," James said sarcastically. "That means she left her fingerprints on it. I'm quite sure I put it in a box and delivered it to Headquarters. I'm equally sure that Headquarters found three perfect female prints on the watch and there is no record of them." He scratched his chin, went on, "If this young lady staying with Mr. Crane is Grace Clark, then how is it the Yard hasn't a record of her prints? Answer me that one and I'll believe she is Grace Clark, but not before."

"It beats me, sir," Rogers said scratching his bullet head and frowning at the photograph. "The likeness is remarkable."

While he was speaking James had broken a heavy red seal on the back of an envelope marked 'Secret.' He drew out a printed notice and waved Rogers to silence while he was reading.

Rogers watched him with considerable interest. It was some time since they had received a 'Secret' envelope from Headquarters, and that was during the war in connection with information concerning espionage.

"Well, blow me!" James said sharply, laid down the notice and regarded Rogers with astonished eyes. "Now, look here, my lad, I'm to pass this information on to you, but no talking mind! I know what you young fellows are. Always trying to impress your girl friends with your importance, but this is 'ush-hush- see? and it's to go no further."

"I understand, sir," Rogers said, stiffening.

"This young woman Grace Clark was last seen in the company of a man known as David Ellis," James said, waving the printed notice. "They give his description here and you'd better study it carefully. But this is the bit that's secret. This David Ellis may very possibly be Edwin Cushman, the renegade, who is known to have escaped from Germany and believed to be hiding in this country. What do you make of that?"

Rogers was startled. "Cushman? The fellow who broadcasted for the Huns?"

"That's the chap," James returned grimly. "It'd be a pretty fine thing for Taleham if we managed to lay our hands on him, wouldn't it?"

"It would indeed, sir," Rogers said, his brain buzzing with the

possibilities of promotion. They might even transfer him to the Yard if he caught Cushman and then he would be in a position to marry Daphne. "May I see the paper, sir?"

"All in good time, my lad," James said, studying the notice with irritating slowness. Rogers saw his face fall as he read on. "Hmm, well, it doesn't look as if he can be in our district. Last they saw of him was at King's Cross, and they think he's gone North."

"But he was with this Grace Clark, sir?"

"So they say. A taxi-driver identified the pair of them. Apparently they knocked their landlady over the head—half-killed her, before they made off."

Rogers came over to the inspector's desk and read the notice over his shoulder.

"Funny thing the girl's down here and he's in the North, isn't it, sir?" he said thoughtfully.

"Who said she was down here?" James snapped. "You be careful, my lad. I've already proved to you that she isn't here." The two men exchanged glances; there was doubt in both their eyes. "If it wasn't for those damned fingerprints . . ." James went on, pulling at his moustache. He picked up the photograph again. "It's like her, but these 'ere photos are so unreliable. If she wasn't deaf . . ."

"Just a minute, sir," Rogers said excitedly. "Mr. Crane did see a fellow snooping near the clubhouse. I've got his description in my book." He pulled out his well-worn notebook and flicked through the pages. "Here we are, sir. Young, aged about nineteen, tall, dark hair, wearing a blue suit, brown shoes, green shirt and black tie. He wore no hat and walked with a slight limp. How does that compare with Cushman's description?"

"Not at all," James said a little sourly. "Cushman's under five foot eight, slim, aged thirty-five, sandy hair, believed to have a self-inflicted knife scar from his right eye to his chin, last seen wearing a brown suit, white shirt and blue tie."

"I wonder if Mr. Crane noticed the scar," Rogers said, reluctant to abandon such a clue.

"Now you'd better hop off on your round, my lad," James said shortly. He felt Rogers was getting too many ideas. "The way your mind is working will lead to trouble." He put the papers away in his desk drawer and locked it. "Mr. Crane's a man of considerable influence. We don't want to tread on his corns. You leave this business to me. It wants handling with tact, and tact, let me tell you, is my strong suit. You just leave it to me."

"Very good, sir," Rogers said, determined to do no such thing. "Then if there's nothing else, sir, I'll be getting along."

James scratched his chin, stared down at his boots.

"I wonder who this Mrs. Julie Brewer is," he said thoughtfully. "I didn't know Mr. Crane had a married sister, did you?"

"No, sir, but that doesn't mean he hasn't. We don't know much about him, do we?"

"Not yet, we don't," James said softly, "but we might keep our eyes open a bit; no harm in that."

"I suppose not, sir," Rogers said, a little puzzled.

James picked up the London telephone directory, glanced down one of the columns of names, grunted, shut the book.

"She's in the book; same address as her identity card. 47c Hay's Mews, Berkeley Square, Mayfair. Good address. We'll have to be careful, Rogers, but I think we might make a few discreet inquiries."

"Yes, sir," Rogers said, his round red face lighting up.

"I don't think we'll make the inquiries through the Yard. It wouldn't do to start something we couldn't finish," James said, getting to his feet. "I've got a day off to-morrow. I might run up to London. Yes, I think I'll have a look round, might even go to Somerset House. Have you ever been to Somerset House, Rogers?"

"Can't say I have, sir," Rogers returned. "That's where they record births and deaths and wills, isn't it?"

"And marriages too. I'd like to know something about Mr. Brewer as well as Mrs. Brewer," James said. "Now, you hop off, my lad, and leave this to me."

"Right-ho, sir," Rogers said, his mind seething with his own plans. "Then I shan't see you until to-morrow evening?"

"That's right. Keep an eye on things and don't be late in the morning, and listen, Rogers, don't you go poking your nose anywhere near Mr. Crane's place while I'm away, understand? That's in order."

Rogers nodded, his face falling. "Very good, sir," he said, but as he bicycled down the village High Street, he decided that he was going to take a look at Crane's bungalow as soon as he came off duty. 'Who knows?' he thought, grinning to himself, 'I might even find Cushman up there. My word! What a surprise for poor old James—him and his Somerset House.'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE light of the big harvest moon that floated serenely in the clear sky turned night almost into day. The white, dusty road winding through Taleham and towards the downs showed up in the moonlight like a phosphorus ribbon of paint.

P.C. Rogers wheeled his bicycle from the wooden shed at the back of his billet, and pushed the machine up the garden path to the road.

Casey, the owner of the local public-house, happened to pass at this moment.

"Going out?" he asked, surprised. "And not in uniform, eh?"

Rogers grinned at him, bent over his lamp and adjusted the smoking wick.

"I'm making a call," he said with a wink.

"Wish I was coming with you," Casey said gloomily. "But I reckon my courting days are over. Careful 'ow you go, George. They're mighty quick to catch you if they can."

"I'll be careful," Rogers returned, swinging his leg over the machine and settling himself on the hard saddle. "So long, Casey," and he peddled away along the twisting road.

It was a two-mile ride to Crane's bungalow and Rogers was in no hurry to get there. He knew the district well and he wanted to give the moon time to climb a little higher above the belt of woods surrounding Crane's place. He didn't intend to grope about in the dark, nor did he wish to use an electric torch. If he reached the bungalow in half an hour's time the light would be just right for him.

He passed Inspector James's house and noted with satisfaction that a light showed in the sitting-room. That meant the inspector had settled down to listen to the nine o'clock news. He wasn't likely to move out now, for Rogers knew his habits well: he liked to get to bed early.

Rogers slowed down as he came to the end of the inspector's garden, got off his machine and stared up at Daphne's window. The light was on but the yellow blind was drawn. He waited for several minutes, hoping at least to see her shadow on the blind, but the yellow glare revealed no sign of her. With a sigh of disappointment, he mounted his bicycle again and rode on.

Although stolid and placid by nature, Rogers was aware of a vague excitement as he rode out of the village. So much depended on what he might discover up at Crane's place. Ever since he had found out that Daphne had been seeing Crane on the sly, not telling her father that she had been for rides in the big Buick, Rogers had disliked the big, fleshy fellow. It wasn't his business to tell James what his daughter was up to, although once or twice he had been tempted to, but had hesitated at the last moment, not knowing how the inspector would receive gossip about his daughter.

There was something about Crane that Rogers didn't like. He didn't know what it was. On the surface he seemed a decent enough fellow. He turned out for the village cricket team and on the field treated Rogers like an equal. He played a good game too, and his slow off-breaks had won many a match when the furious bowling of Rogers was receiving a pasting. But there was something about the fellow—two-faced perhaps. You couldn't believe that he was being pleasant because he liked you, but rather because he thought it might pay him to be nice to you. That's the feeling Rogers had got from the infrequent meetings he had had with the chap.

He was a bit too free with the women too. At one time girls used to come to the bungalow in smart cars with London number plates and stay late—stay all night more often than not. Rogers had spotted their cars parked in Crane's drive while out on his late patrol. Once or twice he'd seen the girls in the garden: smart, hard and as slick as new paint. It worried Rogers when Daphne became friendly with Crane. They had met at the village dance, and Rogers

had spotted her in the Buick several times, seen her at the local cinema with Crane. He didn't like it.

But would Crane deliberately shelter a rat like Cushman? It was unlikely. Crane had a fine war record. He had been one of the Battle of Britain pilots: had won the D.S.O. and D.F.C.: had shot down eleven enemy aircraft, had been shot down twice himself. But you never knew. These rich, daredevil types were up to all kinds of tricks: he might be sheltering Cushman just for the hell of it: then again he mightn't even know the chap was Cushman.

Rogers turned into the steeply-rising lane that led to Crane's bungalow. He got off his machine, put out his cycle lamp, and pushed the machine quietly up the lane, keeping to the grass verge.

The moon, like an old man's face, was just rising above the trees. There was plenty of light and dark shadows. Rogers, who had been a boy scout and had studied the art of stalking, was confident that he could reach the bungalow without being seen.

He left his bicycle against the hedge, a few yards from the big wooden gates of the bungalow, cautiously opened the gates, entered the drive and struck off into the thicket that bordered the drive to the bungalow.

The light of the moon came through the trees and Rogers could easily see where he was going. For a man of his bulk (he was big and muscular) he moved with surprising speed and silence, and as he approached the bungalow, he felt a rising excitement and an eagerness to get the job over.

At the edge of the thicket, as it gave way to the large stretch of lawn, he paused and looked across at the lighted windows. No blinds nor curtains obscured his view and he could look directly into Crane's dining-room from where he stood.

Crane and Grace were seated at a table that stood in the bay window. Two shaded lamps stood at each end of the table, and Rogers could see the gleam of silver and glass reflected in the light.

Crane was wearing evening dress. He was leaning forward, his elbows on the table, his chin in his cupped hands. He appeared to be talking to Grace, who sat at the other end of the table, her hands resting on the carved ends of the chair arms.

Rogers watched them with a tinge of envy. The room was just the kind of room he'd have liked for Daphne. The glass, silver, flowers and the vellum-shaded lamps would have delighted her. A decanter of red wine, that gleamed like a ruby in the light, stood near Crane's elbow, and as Rogers watched, Crane lifted the decanter and poured wine into his glass. He raised the decanter, smiled at Grace, who shook her head and put her hand on her glass, smiling back at him.

Rogers grunted to himself. A pretty enough picture but a waste of time so far as he was concerned. He wished he had brought a pair of field-glasses with him. He was too far away to study Grace closely and he wanted a closer look at her.

Dropping on his hands and knees, he crawled across the lawn,

his eyes on the window. He moved swiftly and silently and arrived just below the window as Crane stood up, pushing his chair back. Grace was already moving to the door, and as Rogers raised his head cautiously so that he could peer over the window-sill, he could only see her back as Crane opened the door and stood aside to let her pass.

She left the room and Crane turned back, wandered over to the sideboard and selected a cigar from a gold box.

Rogers watched him pierce the cigar, light it and study its glowing end reflectively. He could see Crane clearly; there was an odd expression on the big fellow's face that Rogers didn't like. It was an amused, cynical, sneering expression, cruel and unpleasant to see. Crane glanced at the door, smiled again, then poured himself another glass of port. He sat at the table, relaxed, his long, thick fingers toying with the stem of the glass.

For several seconds Rogers watched him, then he began to wonder where Grace had got to. There were a number of lighted windows to investigate, and he turned slowly and began to crawl back to the shadows. Half-way across the lawn, an instinctive feeling of danger made him glance back. Instantly he flattened himself on the damp grass and lay still. Crane was standing at the window looking in his direction. He must have risen to his feet the moment Rogers had begun to move and Rogers lay still, his heart pounding, wondering if Crane could see him.

Fortunately he lay in the shadows of two big fir trees that stood in the middle of the lawn. He felt somehow that Crane couldn't spot him. He had on a dark suit and dark blue shirt and tie. He felt that he should be a difficult object to see. So he lay there, watching Crane, not moving a muscle. After a moment or so he began to breathe more freely. Crane hadn't seen him, he decided, for Crane merely flicked ash out of the open window and turned back to the table. He sat down again.

Rogers breathed a sigh of relief. That was a close call, he told himself—too close, and something to be avoided in the future. He'd been careless, and it would have served him right if he had been caught.

Still keeping in the shadows, he crawled towards the next nearest window, the dew of the grass soaking through his trouser knees, but he was oblivious of the discomfort, so anxious was he to make a discovery.

Peering into the room he was startled to see Grace standing near the window. He was only a few feet from her, and he instantly dropped flat, but a second glance reassured him. She was not looking out of the window but standing in profile, talking to someone out of sight.

Rogers studied her closely. The light fell fully on her face, and he had a moment of doubt. True, she was like the photograph, but he couldn't swear that she was Grace Clark. The dress and the hair style would, of course, make a difference, and he tried to remember

he features of the girl in the photograph and compare them with he face before him. He found the task impossible.

Who was she talking to? he asked himself, his heart beginning to eat excitedly. He raised himself to see further into the room. A bed ame into his line of vision, and he straightened up, risking detection, to see the occupant.

The moment Rogers saw Ellis he knew who he was. The white, ivid scar running from Ellis's right eye to his chin, the sandy hair nd the hard, mean little face were unmistakable.

For a long moment of time Rogers stood staring at Ellis, his nouth dry with excitement, his heart pounding. Here was the traitor, e thought, within his grasp. He had only to arrest him and promoion was assured. James would be generous. He'd forget that Rogers vas acting against orders. It'd be a big thing for Taleham. Every ewspaper reporter in the country would be down. There'd be interiews: Rogers's photograph would appear in the papers. The Army ecurity people would pat him on the back; the Yard would have omething to say to him; might even take him into the plain clothes ivision. Then there was Daphne. She'd look at him differently: e'd be a national figure. His chest expanded. The man who arrested Cushman, the traitor. Why, he'd be a hero!

He dropped on to his hands and knees again, but kept his head aised so he could still see into the room. The next step would be ricky. Should he go for help or make the arrest now? He was big nd confident enough to handle this business himself. If he telehoned for James, he'd have to share the credit. It'd be better to valk right in and make the arrest. Crane wouldn't make trouble. He couldn't afford to in his position. And surely he didn't know vho this man was. Perhaps it would be better for Rogers to see Crane and explain the whole business to him and enlist his aid. Then when he had arrested Cushman, he'd ask Crane to telephone or James. Rogers grinned excitedly to himself as he imagined the ook on the inspector's face.

'It'll be worth a month's pay to see the old boy,' he thought, vatching Grace as she moved about the room. 'And the girl too. She's wanted as well. This is the biggest bit of luck that's ever come ny way.'

And then he heard a rustle behind him, and for no reason that he ould understand he was suddenly frightened as he had never been rightened before. He was too frightened even to look round, and e crouched, waiting, his heart like a lump of lead against his ibs. He felt something touch his back, and then he knew something orrible was about to happen. A cry of terror sprang into his throat ut before he could utter it, before he could make a blind rush owards the lighted window and safety, he received a tremendous low between his shoulder blades and white-hot pain ran through is body.

He fell forward on to the damp grass, his hands ploughing eeply into the rich soil of the flower-bed. He knew he was being

murdered, and he managed to cry out, a croaking sound that filled his ears and told him that he was past help. Blood ran into his mouth and he had a feeling that he was drowning, then the bright lighted window seemed to rush towards him with terrifying speed and explode against his face.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

INSPECTOR JAMES, his hands in his pockets, a dour expression on his face, stood at the far end of the Taleham Station platform. He was anxious that none of the other travellers should get into conversation with him, for he had much on his mind.

On his way to the station, James had passed Rogers's billet and had wondered if Rogers was out of bed yet, decided it was unlikely and resisted the temptation to toss a pebble up at the curtained window. He knew Rogers would be all right on his own: Rogers wasn't a bad sort of lad, he thought reflectively. You could leave him in charge and know the work would be done. There was nothing slap-dash about Rogers; a little obstinate, perhaps, inclined to have too many ideas of his own, but he was keen and loyal and those were two important assets for a policeman to possess.

During the journey to London, James was busy with his thoughts. Although he had only hinted to Rogers that he was uneasy about what was going on at Crane's place, he was quite convinced in his own mind that the girl who called herself Julie Brewer was in fact Grace Clark. He was too practical to accept the coincidence that two girls could exist, both stone-deaf, both aged twenty-two, both with brown hair and eyes, both with the same shaped nose and mouth. But at the same time he knew that there was just the chance that it was a coincidence and before making any move he was determined to prove beyond any doubt that that chance did not exist.

Most of the night he had lain awake thinking about the mysterious fingerprints, and his agile mind was beginning to suspect how it had been possible for the fingerprints on the watch to have had no criminal record.

Nothing went on in the village that James didn't know about. Although Rogers had thought the inspector had no notion of Crane's association with Daphne, the inspector was very much aware of it. At first, he had been inclined to think it was rather a fine thing for a rich young man like Crane to drive his daughter about in a big, showy car. James knew that Daphne was a cut above the other girls in the village, and although he did not approve of her modern ways, he was confident that she had her head screwed on the right way and wasn't likely to get into trouble. But as time went on, he began to doubt whether it was such a fine thing after all. He had kept his eyes open and had finally come to the conclusion that the association might be dangerous. He was in a difficult position. Daphne had gone her own way for a long time: she was self-willed and obstinate,

inclined to fly up if either of her parents attempted to control her. In the past there had been one or two unpleasant rows, and Mrs. James had, of course, sided with her daughter. James, a man of peace in his own home, had given way, and he had hesitated to speak to Daphne about Crane. Then later, Crane seemed to cool off, and Daphne did not see him. James had hoped that the association had burnt itself out.

But had it? he wondered, staring out of the carriage window. His grizzled face was grim. Suppose Crane had got at Daphne and persuaded her to wipe off the fingerprints and substitute her own? It was an idea that had come to him suddenly in the night and had been immediately dismissed as ridiculous. But the idea kept coming back. If that had happened then the mystery of the fingerprints was a mystery no longer. Daphne could have got at the watch. James had packed it in a box and had left it in his bedroom while he attended to his morning duties, taking it into Eastwood on the afternoon train. Yes, she could have easily tampered with the watch; that was something—if she had done it—that must be kept quiet. It'd never do to let Headquarters know a thing like that: might get James himself into serious trouble.

For some time James sat huddled in his corner, a hurt expression in his eyes. What a thing to have happened! His own daughter! The little fool. Well, that settled it, if she had done it, he'd give her the fright of her life. He had with him the photograph of the fingerprints found on the watch and a little chromium box that she kept on her dressing-table. He'd drop in to the Yard and get the fingerprint expert to compare the photograph with the prints on the box. If they were the same, he'd know his suspicions were correct. Then he'd go along to Hay's Mews and check up on this Julie Brewer. Perhaps she had once stayed with Crane and had left her identity card at the bungalow, and Crane had given it to Grace Clark.

By to-night he would have all the facts he wanted to make an arrest. But what of this David Ellis, believed to be Edwin Cushman? Where was he? Had he left Grace Clark? Had she seen him on to a north-bound train and then come alone to Taleham, or had the journey to King's Cross been a feint and they had both come here? If so, where was Ellis?

James brooded. There was something at the back of his mind that had been puzzling him. Why had the first-aid stretcher been taken from the clubhouse? At first he thought it might have been a convenient means of carrying the things that were missing, but a stretcher needed two people to carry it. Had the stretcher been used for this purpose or had one of them been hurt? Was it Cushman who had been hurt? Had the girl dragged him on the stretcher to the shelter of the woods and then led Rogers in the opposite direction, meeting Crane who, for some reason or other, had decided to shelter her? James scratched his chin. 'Mustn't let my ideas run away with me,' he thought; 'but it's an interesting theory.'

When he arrived at Paddington, he went immediately to Scot-

land Yard and made his way along the long corridors to the Fingerprint Department. Here he found his old friend, Ted Edwards, at work. Edwards and he had both joined the force at the same time and had also served together in the same regiment during the 1914–18 war.

Edwards, a big, fat, good-natured looking man with reddish hair and fair, freckled complexion, smiled when he saw James come in.

"What-ho, me beauty," he said in his wheezy, soft voice. "Didn't expect to see your ugly mug on a beautiful morning like this. What brings you here? Business?"

James, who didn't feel particularly jovial, nodded sourly. "Private business," he said. "I want you to look at these prints and let me know if they're the same. You might get a move on, Ted, I'm pressed for time."

The sandy eyebrows went up, and Edwards looked surprised.

"And take that silly look off your face," James barked, putting the chromium box on Edwards's desk. "It makes you look sillier than you are."

Edwards grinned. "Got out of bed the wrong side, haven't you?" he said, picking up the box and dusting it with print powder. "Never mind, you were always a one to miss your Enos."

James took out his pipe, filled it and moved uneasily about the room. Edwards's verdict was going to be of tremendous importance. Not only would it make things difficult at home, but it might also lead to the arrest of Edwin Cushman.

There was a moment's pause, then Edwards said, "They're the same prints?"

James sighed. "Sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure," Edwards said with an expansive smile. "Have you ever known me to be wrong yet?"

"I can't say I have," James said quietly, picked up the box and the photograph and put them in his pocket. "Well, thanks, Ted."

"What's up?" Edwards asked, his moon face suddenly serious. "Anything wrong, Joe?"

"Nothing no one can do anything about," James returned. "I'll have to be getting along. Thanks for your help, Ted."

Edwards grunted, watched the inspector walk to the door. He noticed the military bearing was a little slumped, the spring missing from the walk.

'Getting an old man,' he thought. 'Pity. One of the good sorts. Well, well, we all have to come to it.'

The corridor seemed very long as James walked towards the stairs. So Daphne had tampered with the watch as he had thought. The little fool! Fancy doing a thing like that. Well, no one must know. Somehow it had to be hushed up. He'd have to get Grace's fingerprints again, and this time, there must be no mistake. She *must* be Grace Clark, he told himself; but even now, he was cautious. Better get her prints again before he took action, but he'd have to be careful. It looked as if Crane was up to his ears in this business.

And Crane could be dangerous. He was glad he had told Rogers not to go near the bungalow. That was one good thing about Rogers: he obeyed orders. Of course, he was headstrong and keen, and if James hadn't ordered him to keep away from the place he might have taken it into his head to have had a look round. It wouldn't do to alarm them: anyway, not yet. No, Rogers would obey orders and James would have time to lay his plans. There must be no mistake next time. He'd prepare a trap and catch both Crane and Grace Clark and if Cushman turned up in the net so much the better.

Big Ben was striking eleven o'clock as James made his way through the gateway of Scotland Yard. He nodded to the constable on duty who nodded back without any show of interest. These young chaps, James thought gloomily, not like the old days. Still nothing's the same. We have to keep pace with the times.

He hailed a passing taxi, got in.

"47c Hay's Mews, off Berkeley Square," he said.

"Right-ho, guv'nor," the driver returned, and drove James rapidly along the Embankment, up Whitehall towards Trafalgar Square.

CHAPTER TWENTY

HAY'S MEWS lay parallel with Charles Street and was the usual kind of Mews to be found in Mayfair's back alleys. On each side of the Mews was a sedate line of garages over which were dwelling places, called, for a better word, flats. The cobblestones and twisty chimneys added to the picturesque appearance of the Mews, and three or four chauffeurs in their shirt sleeves, cleaning their cars, lent industry to an otherwise silent and sleepy backwater.

Inspector James marched down the Mews, aware that the chauffeurs were eyeing him with jaded interest. He was anxious now to get his business over and return to Taleham, for he had something to say to his daughter and he was impatient to say it.

Number 47c was a garage with a flat above like all the other garages in the Mews. It had, however, certain distinctions. The front door was painted scarlet and had glittering chromium fittings. The window-frames were also painted scarlet and two attractive window-boxes, crowded with multi-coloured blooms, added to its gay appearance.

Number 47c was easily the most prosperous-looking of the flats in the Mews and James eyed it with respect. He knew the power of money, and he was suddenly conscious that he was acting in an official capacity, but that fact did not deter him from ringing the front door bell.

He waited patiently, conscious of a jeering kind of scrutiny from the chauffeurs. After a minute or so, he rang again, but still received no answer. He stepped back, glanced up at the windows, but their curtained panes gave away no secrets.

"Bit early for that sort of thing, matey," one of the chauffeurs remarked. He was a small, rat-eyed man, with a hard mouth and curiously deformed ears: they curled inwards and were without lobes.

James regarded him coldly.

"Speaking to me, my lad?" he barked.

The chauffeur grinned. "Don't 'ave to ask permission to speak to yer, do I?" he demanded, his hands on his hips. "I said it was a bit early for that kind of thing and I might add a man of your age oughta know better."

"What exactly do you mean by that?" James asked quietly, although his moustache began to bristle.

"Come orf it, dad," the chauffeur sneered. "We all know wot you're after."

"Oh, you do?" James snapped, now thoroughly annoyed. "I don't know what you're talking about, but if you don't explain pretty quick you'll laugh the other side of your ugly phiz."

The chauffeur lost his grin. He scowled threateningly. "Now look 'ere, dad," he said. "Mind 'oo you're talking to. If yer wasn't old enough to fertilize a graveyard I'd dot you one in the eye."

With a wintry smile James produced his warrant.

"Take a look at that," he said evenly, "and then perhaps you'll remember your manners."

At the sight of the police card the chauffeur's attitude changed abruptly.

"Blimey, a busy!" he exclaimed. "Why couldn't you 'ave said so before? First busy I've lamped oo's got small feet. Thought you was a perishing farmer, damned if I didn't."

"Never mind who you thought I was," James said, fixing him with his piercing blue eyes. "Suppose you tell me who you are—what's your name?"

"Sam White," the man told him, a scared look in his eyes. "I don't want no trouble, mister. I was only 'aving a bit of fun."

"I don't like your idea of fun," James rasped. "You'd better explain what you meant just now. A bit too early for what?"

"Well, it was only my little joke, see?" White said, shuffling his feet. The other chauffeurs exchanged grins, paused to listen. "Seeing yer ringing on the bell, I thought yer was one of 'er clients."

"Oh, did you?" James said, light dawning. He hid a grin. "So she's one of those, is she?"

"That's right, guv'nor," White said, eager to curry favour. "Very choosey and 'igh class, but one of 'em just the same."

James glanced at the flat.

"I might have guessed it," he muttered half to himself. "She advertises all right, doesn't she?"

White grinned uneasily. "Well, it pays to advertise, don't it? They call 'er the Scarlet Lady around 'ere. Not a bad piece, but a bit snooty unless you 'ave a 'undred smackers to spend on 'er."

"I suppose she's still in bed," James said.

"No, she ain't, guv'nor; she's away. I 'aven't seen 'er around for more than a month."

James frowned. Could she be the girl staying with Crane after all? he wondered uneasily. He doubted it. There was nothing of the professional courtesan about that girl; in fact she was rather a simple-looking kid.

"Well, that's a pity. I wanted to talk to her. Any idea where she's gone?"

"No idea at all, guv'nor, but there's a woman wot comes regularly to clean the place; she might know."

"And when does she turn up?"

"Should be 'ere any minute now." White looked up and down the Mews. "She's usually 'ere by ten o'clock."

James took Grace's photograph from his pocket.

"Would you say this was the Brewer woman?"

White glanced at the photograph and burst out laughing. "'Er? Not likely! Why, she's no more like Julie than I'm like 'Eddy Larmarr."

James grunted, put the photograph away. That seemed to settle it, he thought. So the girl was not Julie Brewer in spite of having Julie Brewer's identity card. Well, it looked as if Crane was in this business all right. He had introduced the girl as Julie Brewer, unless, of course, she had stolen the identity card and had passed herself off as Julie Brewer to Crane. James was becoming more and more convinced that the girl was Grace Clark. Was it worth while hanging about for further information or should he get back to Taleham? He decided, after a moment's hesitation, to investigate further. He'd like to find out if he could how Grace Clark had got hold of Julie's identity card. He'd also like to find out if Crane happened to know Julie.

"'Ere she is now," White said, jerking his thumb to a woman who was hurrying towards them.

"All right, you get on with your work and keep out of this," James said, suddenly official. "And watch your tongue in the future."

"Right-ho, guv'nor," White returned sheepishly, and wandered back to the old-fashioned Daimler he had been cleaning.

James eyed the woman as she walked towards him. She was hard-featured and hostile, and as she approached she glanced at him suspiciously.

James nodded. "Good morning. I'm looking for Mrs. Brewer."

"Well, she ain't in," the woman said shortly.

"Then I'd like to talk to you," James returned, an edge to his voice.

She eyed him over. "Police?" she asked, a stony expression now on her face.

"That's right. We'll go inside where we can talk without these monkeys listening in."

"No, we won't," the woman snapped back. "You can say what

you want to say here and then hop it. I've no time to talk to coppers."

"This may be a serious matter," James said in his most official manner. "We can't talk in the street."

The woman hesitated. "Well, come in then." She unlocked the front door. "But you can't stay long. I've got a lot to do."

It was easy to see that the woman was worried in spite of her suspicion and coldness, and as James followed her up the steep stairs that led to the flat he had a feeling that his visit was not as unwelcomed as she made out.

The woman showed him into a luxuriously furnished sitting-room and planted herself defensively before the fireplace. Looking around, James was astonished at the rich furnishing and excellent taste of the room. The colour scheme had been chosen and blended with considerable skill and the furniture was obviously worth thousands of pounds.

"My word!" he exclaimed, startled. "She knows how to make herself comfortable, doesn't she?"

The woman made an impatient movement. "What do you want?" she demanded. "Come on, say your say and hop it."

"Let's have your name for a start," James said, placing his hat carefully on a chair and taking out his notebook.

"Mrs. Fowler if it's any business of yours."

"How long has Mrs. Brewer been missing?"

The woman's eyes shifted. "I didn't say she was missing, did I? She's away."

"Now let's be frank with each other," James said. "You know as well as I do she's disappeared. We've found her identity card."

Mrs. Fowler drew in a sharp breath. "Her identity card?" she repeated, her eyes showing fear. "Where? How did you find it?"

"We found it," James said, determined to give nothing away. "So you may as well be helpful in case something's happened to her."

Mrs. Fowler sat down abruptly. "What could have happened to her?" she asked. "What are you hinting at?"

"I'm not hinting at anything. She's disappeared; her identity card's been found and that might mean she's met with an accident."

There was a long pause, then Mrs. Fowler said in a low voice, "What do you want to know?"

"How long has she been missing?"

"About four weeks."

"Can you get it closer than that? When did she leave here?"

Mrs. Fowler thought for a moment, crossed the room to consult a calendar. "It was a Saturday. It'd be the 10th of July."

"And it's now the 20th of August. Hmm, did she say where she was going?"

"She said something about going to the country for a week or two."

"Alone?"

"Well, no. She went away with her gentlemen friends from ime to time. She was going with one of them, I believe."

"You'll have to do better than that," James said sharply. "I wasn't born yesterday, you know. She's a professional, isn't she?"

Mrs. Fowler bridled. "She isn't a common streetwalker, if that's what you are trying to insinuate. She has gentlemen friends, and f she likes to give them a good time and if they like to give her a present now and then, there's nothing wrong with that, is there? And let me tell you, she only moves in the very best circles. Why, only a month ago, Lord . . ."

"All right, all right," James broke in hastily. He had a horror of poking into the grimy secrets of the aristocracy. "So she planned to spend a couple of weeks in the country, is that it?"

Mrs. Fowler nodded.

"Didn't she give you any idea where she was going?"

"She didn't discuss her plans with me," Mrs. Fowler said a little curtly.

"But she did say she was coming back in a couple of weeks' time? She didn't suggest that she might be longer?"

"She had to be back by the 27th of July because she had agreed to spend that week-end with Sir Charles . . ."

"Never mind who she was going to spend the week-end with," James said hurriedly, thinking this young woman seemed to be corrupting the bulk of the aristocracy. "She didn't write or telephone?"

"I haven't heard a word from her. I was surprised and a bit worried when she didn't turn up for the 27th. Sir Charles was ever so put out."

"I expect he was," James said dryly. "She has never gone off for so long before?"

"Never, that's why I'm worried. I've known Julie for a long time and I wouldn't like to change my job, but if she stays away much longer I'll have to. I can't live on air."

"You have no idea who she went with? I mean did you see her leave? Did you catch sight of her companion?"

"I saw her leave all right. I was in the kitchen when the Buick turned up and I called out to Julie to have a good time."

"The Buick?" James repeated, stiffening.

"That's right. A big car, black and as long as a street. I never saw the gentleman. He never got out of the car, just tooted on the hooter and Julie went down. I've looked out of the window many a time but I've never seen him. You can't, you know, from these windows. You can only see the top of the car."

"You didn't think to take its number?" James asked, thinking of Crane's big, black Buick in which Daphne used to go for rides.

"What on earth for?" Mrs. Fowler returned. "I'll have you know I've better things to do than take the numbers of cars. I've never heard of such a thing."

"So this chap—the owner of the Buick—had been here before?"

"Oh, yes. He comes about twice a month, and Julie goes off and spends the night with him. She never said where they stay, but he was generous. He gave her a squirrel coat once."

"You never heard his name?"

"Julie called him Dick. I've heard her talk to him on the telephone. You don't think he's done her harm, do you?"

"I don't know," James said, controlling his rising excitement. It must be Crane, he thought. The same Christian name and the same make of car. It must be the chap. "Young ladies who have so many gentlemen friends," he went on gravely, "are asking for trouble and sometimes they get it."

Mrs. Fowler lost colour. "Well, you'd better do something," she said, getting up. "You'd better find them."

"I'll find them," James said, took Grace's photograph from his pocket. "Ever seen this young woman before?"

Mrs. Fowler shook her head. "Who is she?"

"Never mind," James said with a sigh. "When I hear anything I'll let you know."

He left her, made his way down the steep stairs and into the Mews.

The chauffeur, White, eyed him expectantly, but James ignored him. He walked slowly towards Berkeley Square, deep in thought. There was even more to this business than he had realized. What had happened to Julie Brewer?

A cruising taxi stopped at his signal.

"Somerset House," he said to the driver and sat back, his face grim, his eyes worried.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Major-General Sir Hugh Franklin Steward, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., Chief Constable of the district, was pottering among his roses when Inspector James was announced.

Sir Hugh, a tall, white-headed man in his late sixties, sighed regretfully, said he would be along in a moment. Always someone worrying about something, he thought. There seemed very little peace these days. What in the world did this chap want? Must be some private matter: couldn't be police business. James had no official access to the Chief Constable: he'd have to go through the proper channels.

Sir Hugh laid down his pruning knife, gave a lingering look at the orderly rows of rose bushes, and ambled towards the vast house that was now too large for him since he had lost three sons in the war and his daughter was soon to be married.

Inspector James was waiting in the hall. He stood stiffly to attention beneath a fine head of a tiger, shot by Sir Hugh some forty years ago in the Province of Bengal, and seemed ill at ease.

"Morning, James," Sir Hugh said, nodding amiably. "Don't see

enough of you these days. I believe this must be your first visit to the house, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," James said, looking as awkward as he felt.

"It's a nice old place, but too big for us now, and the taxes are far too high. Ought to think about finding something smaller, but it won't be easy and I shall miss my roses. Did you see them as you came up the drive?"

"I did, sir; very fine if I may say so."

Sir Hugh beamed. "Well, they aren't bad," he returned. "The Sultans of Zanzibar and the Lady Ashtowns should get firsts at the show, although Colonel Harrison seems very confident he's got something up his sleeve to surprise me. You haven't seen his roses, have you?"

James shifted his feet, said he hadn't.

Sir Hugh looked at him vaguely, remembered James couldn't have called to discuss roses, sighed.

"Mustn't get on to roses," he said, taking James's arm and leading him into his study: a comfortable room, full of books, flowers and shooting trophies. "I'm a bit of a bore when it comes to roses, I'm afraid. Sit down and make yourself at home." He glanced at the ornate clock on the mantelpiece, saw it was a few minutes after six o'clock. "Wouldn't be bad to have a little something, would it?" he went on, producing a bottle of whisky from his desk drawer. "I don't usually take whisky at this hour, but I think the occasion calls for one, don't you? Your first visit, eh?"

James cleared his throat. He appreciated Sir Hugh's attempt to put him at ease, but he was desperately anxious to get down to business. "I don't think I will, sir," he said uneasily. "Thank you all the same. I—er—I have an important matter to discuss with you. . . ."

"Nonsense," Sir Hugh said, pouring two staggeringly big whiskies into glasses he had also produced from his desk. "You're as nervous as a young bride, James. Here, get this down you and relax. You don't have to be frightened of me. Let me tell you I was far more frightened of my R.S.M. than I ever was of a visiting General."

But James's wooden face did not relax. He took the whisky, but placed it on the desk.

"Thank you, sir, perhaps later," he said. "I've come to you because I feel you should be the first to be consulted. It's police business, sir."

Sir Hugh lowered himself into the padded leather chair behind his desk.

"But, surely, James, we're not following the usual procedure, are we? Shouldn't you make a report to Headquarters or have you done that?"

"No, sir," James said. "I know it's unusual, but the circumstances are unusual. Perhaps you could consider this interview as unofficial. I badly need your advice, sir."

Sir Hugh rubbed his jaw, stared up at the ceiling. He had visions of an infuriated Superintendent at Headquarters.

"Well, I don't know what to say, James," he returned. "Hadn't you better put in a report? It might save a lot of trouble later. The Super won't like you coming direct to me, you know."

"I realize that, sir," James said stubbornly, "but I honestly believe you are the only person who can help at this stage. It's really a matter for the Military Intelligence."

Sir Hugh stiffened. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Perhaps I'd better begin at the beginning, sir. It'll save time in the long run."

"Well, all right, go ahead. You can smoke if you want to. I do wish you'd look more at ease. I don't bite, you know." Sir Hugh grinned a little, shook his head as he saw James was still unbending. "Well, tell me what it's all about."

"Two days ago, sir," James began, "that is on 18th August, Rogers (he's my assistant, sir, if you remember?) received a call from the Golf Club. The Secretary reported that the clubhouse had been broken into and that a number of articles were missing."

Sir Hugh frowned. "But I know all about that," he said. "What in the world has a little thing like that to do with Military Intelligence?"

"I'm afraid this is going to be rather a long and involved story, sir," James said. "If you'd give me a clear field I'll endeavour not to keep you."

"You mean I mustn't interrupt, is that it?" Sir Hugh said with a smile. "All right, carry on, James. I promise not to say another word."

"Thank you, sir," James said, pulling at his moustache. "Well, to go on, sir: Rogers had a look round and from footprints and marks found on the ground he reconstructed what had happened. He's rather good at that kind of thing, sir, and I have every reason to believe that his reconstruction is the correct one."

Sir Hugh nodded, stifled a yawn and looked longingly out of the window at his Sultans of Zanzibar.

"It would seem, sir," James went on, "that on the evening of the seventeenth, an unknown man and woman arrived at the golf course station. They were not seen, but their prints are easy enough to follow from the station. Half-way up the hill, they hid in a thicket. The Secretary tells me he was working late, and it may well be that they got out of his way as he walked to the station to catch a train home. After he had gone, these two went to the deserted clubhouse and the man broke a pane of glass and entered. He went to the front door to let the woman in, but for some reason or other, she ran away. The man followed her and they appeared to have spent the night in the trench on the fourth fairway. Later, possibly early in the morning, the woman returned to the clubhouse alone. Among the things stolen was a first-aid stretcher. The fact that Rogers could find no further footprints of the man after he had arrived

at the trench suggests that he met with an accident and that the woman dragged him to the wood on the stretcher. I have been up to the course and have found marks in the grass which bear this theory out. Rogers is also convinced that this is what happened."

Sir Hugh sipped his whisky, nodded. He still wasn't particularly interested, but was listening more attentively now.

"This chap Rogers seems a smart police officer," he observed. "Has he been with you long?"

"About two years, sir," James said shortly. He wanted to get on with his story. "Rogers suggested to the Secretary that the woods should be searched and the Secretary agreed. They, and Mr. Malcolm who was present, were about to go to the woods when they saw a young woman, dressed in a golfing outfit, appear above the crest of the hill of the fourth fairway and look in their direction. For a moment they thought nothing of it, but as soon as she saw them, she began to run in the opposite direction."

"Drawing them away from the wood, eh?" Sir Hugh said, pleased that he had thought of this idea.

"It's possible, but Rogers thought a bird in hand was worth two in a bush. (Begging your pardon, sir, no pun meant.) The girl could run, and he yelled to her to stop, but she kept on and succeeded in shaking Rogers off. When he did get on to her trail again, he was surprised to find her playing golf with Mr. Richard Crane."

Sir Hugh started, sat up stiffly. "With Crane? Are you sure?" He was now all attention, went on, "Then who the devil was she?"

"I'm coming to that, sir," James said, not to be hurried. "Of course, as soon as Rogers saw Mr. Crane knew the young lady he realized he had made a mistake, and he waited until the Secretary and Mr. Malcolm came up. They handled the interview from then on."

Sir Hugh sipped his whisky again.

"Go on, man, go on," he said a little impatiently.

"Mr. Crane introduced the lady as Mrs. Julie Brewer: who, I learned later from him, is his married sister."

Sir Hugh's eyebrows went up. "He told you that, did he? I didn't know he had a sister."

"Mr. Crane *said* she was his sister, sir," James said quietly. "Further, he went on to explain that she was stone deaf and, although able to lip-read, her deafness had prevented her from hearing Rogers's shouts. Rogers accepted the information and apologized."

"From the tone of your voice Rogers shouldn't have accepted the information. What are you getting at?" Sir Hugh asked, frowning.

"We'll come to that in a moment, sir, if you please," James returned. "Mr. Crane also volunteered the information that he had seen a young fellow sneaking across the course and gave a detailed description of him. Rogers went off immediately in the direction indicated but failed to find any trace of him."

"Is there much more of this?" Sir Hugh asked, glancing at the clock.

"I won't keep you much longer, sir," James said so quietly and seriously that Sir Hugh again looked sharply at him. "Rogers submitted a detailed report to me and I decided to call on Mr. Crane."

"What on earth for?"

"I wasn't entirely satisfied with Mr. Crane's explanation about the young lady," James said, avoiding Sir Hugh's eyes.

"Good God!" Sir Hugh muttered, controlled himself and set down his whisky with a little bang on his desk. "Well, go on. You weren't satisfied with Mr. Crane's explanation; so what did you do?"

"Mr. Crane happened to be out when I called, sir, but I did have a short interview with the young lady who claims to be Mrs. Brewer. It wasn't an entirely satisfactory interview, so I asked for her identity card."

"A bit high-handed, surely, James?"

"I was very tactful, sir," James said reassuringly, "and I was not satisfied that the young lady was Mrs. Brewer. I thought she might be connected with the robbery at the clubhouse and that Mr. Crane was giving her sanctuary, so to speak."

"I've never heard such utter nonsense in my life," Sir Hugh exclaimed, his face flushing. "Before you say anything further about Mr. Crane I'll have you know he is a personal friend of mine and I like him very much. He's a fine boy, and I'll tell you something else, only I don't want this to go further for the moment; he is going to be my son-in-law. So please be careful what you're saying, and for goodness sake stop indulging in wild and ridiculous theories."

There was a heavy silence. James regarded Sir Hugh with blank, dismayed eyes. "Your son-in-law, sir?" he repeated stupidly. "I wasn't aware . . ."

"Of course you weren't, man. No one knows yet. They want to keep it quiet until the engagement has been announced. Don't ask me why. Young people of to-day have all kinds of odd ideas. Anyway, Richard will be my son-in-law in about six months' time, and a fine son-in-law and husband he'll make too. You know his war record?"

James pulled at his moustache. "Yes, sir, it's a very fine one," he said miserably. He moved his long, thin legs, scratched his chin, looked anywhere but at Sir Hugh.

"Well, get on with your tale, man. I must say you've made a holy mess of things up to now. I'll have to speak to Mr. Crane about this —have to apologize to his sister," Sir Hugh said, frowning. "For God's sake don't tell me you've put your foot into it further still?"

"I don't think so, sir," James said. "This is very awkward now I know your daughter . . ."

"Why should it be awkward? Unless, of course, you've . . . well, go on, tell me. I may as well know the worst."

"Well, sir, I took the liberty of obtaining the young lady's finger-
prints."

Sir Hugh groaned. "My dear fellow . . ." he began, but James
hurriedly broke in.

"It was done very tactfully. I persuaded her to handle my watch
nd obtained her prints that way. I'm sure she had no idea what
was after, but I have a shrewd suspicion that Mr. Crane, who
vas present, guessed. I sent the watch to Headquarters to have the
prints checked."

"Bless my soul," Sir Hugh said, getting up and pacing the room.
I've never heard of such a thing. It's a wonder Mr. Crane hasn't
een on to me. When did you say this happened?"

"Yesterday morning, sir," James said and cleared his throat. He
vondered what Sir Hugh would say when he had learnt the whole
ruth. James was aware of a trickle of perspiration running down
his nose and he took out his handkerchief and mopped his face.
There was no record of the prints, sir," he went on gently.

"Well, of course there wasn't," Sir Hugh said angrily. "I could
ave told you that in the first place."

"But there was a reason for that, sir," James said. "The watch had
een tampered with. The young lady's prints had been removed
nd my daughter's prints substituted. Naturally there was no
ecord."

Sir Hugh blinked. "Your daughter? How does she come into
his?"

"At one time, three or four months ago, sir, Mr. Crane and my
laughter were very friendly, I regret to say. I believe Mr. Crane
ersuaded Daphne to wipe the watch clean of prints and then
andle the watch herself."

There was a long pause, then Sir Hugh said in a strangled voice,
I hope you realize what you're saying."

"I'm afraid I do, sir," James returned unhappily. "I have tried
o persuade Daphne to tell the truth but she denies everything,
nd yet her prints are on the watch."

"I don't give a damn about that. You have no right to say Mr.
Crane persuaded your daughter to do such a thing," Sir Hugh
aid, anger in his voice. "This is a very serious accusation, James."

"I believe Mr. Crane was most anxious that the young lady call-
ng herself Mrs. Brewer should not have her prints checked, because
er real identity would have been discovered. I am certain that Mr.
Crane, for reasons best known to himself, is sheltering this young
voman. I've been to Somerset House, sir, and he has no sister. I've
hecked the records of his family."

Sir Hugh sat down abruptly. His face was a study.

"But this is really fantastic," he said. "If she's not his sister, then
vho the devil is she?"

"You have seen the secret report that came in yesterday about
he man Cushman, sir?" James asked.

Sir Hugh's eyes widened. "Of course I have. What the devil. . .?"

"You'll remember this Cushman chap was last seen in the company of a woman, identified as Grace Clark, wanted for theft and an ex-convict?"

Sir Hugh nodded.

"I think the young lady with Mr. Crane is Grace Clark," James said and waited for the storm to break.

"You must be cracked," Sir Hugh said, clenching his fists and glaring at James. "You say she . . . but, damn it, you've just told me her name is Julie Brewer and you've seen her identity card."

"Julie Brewer is a prostitute, sir," James said slowly. "I've gone into details concerning her and have learned that Mr. Crane has been associating with her. She is now missing, but I think Mr. Crane got hold of her identity card and gave it to Grace Clark."

"What an abominable insinuation," Sir Hugh said, now very angry. "I think you've said quite enough. Frankly, I don't believe a word you say. I must speak to your Superintendent about you. The only explanation is that you're heading for a nervous breakdown and don't know what you're saying. How dare you say that Mr. Crane associates with a prostitute!"

"I'm very sorry, sir," James returned, pale but determined. "I have all the necessary evidence otherwise I wouldn't make such a statement."

"I don't believe it!" Sir Hugh barked. "And I'm not listening to any more of this. Return to your station immediately. I shall take this up with your Superintendent."

James got to his feet. He stood before Sir Hugh and looked him straight in the eyes.

"There is one more thing, sir," he said evenly, "and then I've finished. Rogers is missing. He went out last night, and I suspect he went up to Mr. Crane's place. He hasn't been seen since. I'm drawing my own conclusions. Grace Clark was seen with Edwin Cushman. She is now with Mr. Crane. Cushman may be there too. He is a dangerous man. If Rogers found him, he might . . . It sounds dramatic, I know, but he might have killed Rogers. Look at his record, sir. He's a killer. Something has happened to Rogers. That's why I've come to you. The responsibility rests with you now, sir. I want orders. What am I to do?"

PART FOUR

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"WHERE is he?" Ellis asked as Grace came into the room.

The light of the pink-shaded bedlamp accentuated the faint flush on her face. Her eyes were bright, and there was a radiance on her face that transfigured her: made her look beautiful.

"He's finishing his cigar," she said. There was a new note in her voice that conveyed to Ellis that she was even happier than she looked. "Is there anything you want?" she went on. "Or shall I turn out the light? You should sleep now."

'How happy she is,' Ellis thought bitterly. 'To think a few hours ago she was a drudge, ready to accept what I threw at her, and now —look at her.'

"Won't you talk to me for a few moments?" he asked, false humility in his voice. "I've been alone all day. It's not much fun being lonely. But, of course, you have each other now."

She came further into the room.

"I can't stay long," she said and closed the door. "What did you want to talk about?"

Ellis controlled himself with difficulty. It was no use showing his anger: she would only go away. He had to talk to her: reason with her: save her if he could.

An hour or so ago, Crane had said, "You must congratulate me. Grace, has promised to be my wife," and he had left Ellis alone, stricken, as if he had received a physical blow. He had lain in the bed listening to them talking while they had dinner; he heard the murmur of their voices, the sudden soft laughter, the sharp pop of the champagne cork as it came from the bottle.

Grace has promised to be my wife. The sentence bit into his brain like vitriol. What did it mean? Crane wouldn't marry a girl like Grace. Ellis was sure of that. He was leading her up the garden path; he was going to seduce her, and this promise of marriage had been made to lull her suspicions. And because she was stupid, uneducated and romantic she believed what he said: believed he loved her and would marry her even though they had met for the first time only a few hours ago.

But how could he warn her: save her from being hurt? She disliked him; distrusted him now. Crane would have poisoned her mind against him. Anything he said would be useless, but he had to try.

All right, admit it, he thought savagely. You're in love with the girl yourself. For the first time in your life you've discovered someone to care for. You don't want her to get hurt. That's a joke after the way you've hurt her yourself in the past; after the beastly things

you've said to her. Now, all of a sudden, you're in love with her, and you know unless you're smart you'll lose her. You're in a panic. You'd do anything to keep her. And the joke is she doesn't care a hoot for you; hates you. You can see the indifference in her eyes when she looks at you. It's Crane she loves. Crane she's thinking about now. She wouldn't believe that you want to save her from Crane: wouldn't believe, anyway, that Crane intended to hurt her.

"He says he's going to marry you," Ellis said slowly, watching her.

She looked away, a dark flood of colour rising in her face.

"I'd rather not talk about it," she said, twisting and untwisting her hands. "It's—it's something between Richard and me. . . ."

Ellis clenched his fists under the sheet. He wanted to shout: "Stop it, you sloppy bitch!" but he kept control of himself, kept his voice steady as he said: "But I don't understand. Why, you two have only met to-day. He's joking, isn't he? You don't want to marry him, do you?"

She smiled secretly and that smile frightened him. He saw at once how hopeless it was to persuade her; to try to show her that the whole thing was a trap.

"Oh, yes," she said. "He loved me the moment he saw me. He told me so. I loved him too."

Again Ellis longed to tear at the fabric of sentimentality that clothed her mind, but again he restrained himself.

"But he can't marry you," he persisted. "You're not in his class. You must realize that. He's rich, well educated, a gentleman. What are you?"

Again she smiled secretly.

"He says it doesn't matter. We had a long talk about ourselves after supper. You see, he's lonely. He needs someone to look after him, and he says he needs someone like me." She looked wistfully at Ellis. "I couldn't believe it at first. No one has ever wanted me before. But I believe it now. He wants someone to run this place; not a society beauty as he calls them. I could do it. I could do anything for him. I could learn to do things, and—and—anyway, he loves me."

"But you wouldn't be happy," Ellis said, probing, trying to find a weakness in her armour of happiness. "It might be all right for a year or so, but you'll get fat and coarse. You know you will. Think of your mother. You'll be like her in a few years—over-blown. Then how do you think he will like you?"

It was a shot in the dark but it brought a deep flush to Grace's face.

"I won't be like my mother," she said angrily. "You don't know what you're saying. She was bad—wouldn't do anything for my father. Well, I'd do anything for him—Richard."

"You'll disgrace him. You're a thief," Ellis said, feeling that he had gained a point and pressing his advantage. "His friends won't want to meet you. Why should they? You having nothing

to offer, no manners, no idea how to entertain; why, you can't even speak grammatically."

She turned away.

"I won't stay if you're going to say things like that."

"Don't go," he said, alarmed. If she left him now he would have no chance of saving her. "I told you I didn't trust him. I don't. He's promised to marry you for a reason. I know he has. He wants you. Don't you understand?" He groped about for the word, hesitated, went on, "he wants to seduce you, you little fool, and then throw you aside. I know that's what he plans to do."

"I won't listen to you," she burst out, facing him. "You're evil. He said you were. He warned me not to listen to you. We love each other, and nothing you say will make any difference. You'd better get well and go. Can't you see you're in the way? You're not wanted. We both hate you!"

She ran from the room, slamming the door behind her.

Ellis dropped back on his pillow, his face a mask of frustrated anger and despair. He had wanted to tell her to leave Crane and come with him. He would have offered her a home; she could have looked after him, helped him. But it was no use: she wouldn't listen to him.

He closed his eyes while he thought what he could do now. Perhaps he'd better talk to Crane; warn him not to hurt her; threaten him. But he knew Crane would only laugh at him. If only Scragger were here. Scragger would settle Crane's hash and take Ellis and Grace away. Once she was away from Crane's influence, Grace would see reason. But how to get hold of Scragger? Was he on the telephone? It was a chance: unlikely, but a chance.

Where was the telephone book? How to get hold of it without raising suspicion? And then how to reach the telephone which was in the hall? If he could only put through a call to Scragger he might . . .

He suddenly had a feeling that someone was watching him, and without turning his head, he glanced cautiously out of the corners of his eyes towards the window. All he could see was the reflection of the room on the window-pane against the darkness of the night. Yet he was sure that someone was looking into the room and he felt the hair on the nape of his neck bristle.

He could not bring himself to look directly at the window. He had an absurd idea that if he did not look at the window, the person who was looking in mightn't notice him. Was it the police? Who could it be? It wasn't Grace or Crane. He could hear them talking in the other room.

Terror suddenly seized hold of him, paralysing every sense except the seeing-sense. Somewhere in the high trees outside an owl hooted, and then silence closed in again, but still the person outside continued to look into the room, stare at him.

Ellis opened his mouth to call to Crane, but thought better of it. He suddenly put out a shaking hand and snapped up the switch

on the electric lamp. The room went dark, and instantly he could see the dim shape of trees and hedges through the window in the half-obscured light of the moon. He saw something else too. Something that made him stiffen, chilled his blood, gave him a restricted, choking feeling in his throat. There was a man outside, crouching just below the window, his head and shoulders silhouetted against the semi-darkness.

With a strangled cry, Ellis started up in bed. He saw two staring eyes and a flattened nose against the window-pane, but the face was shapeless, appeared to be non-existent. It was a horrible, terrifying sight: a pair of gleaming eyes, the shape of a flattened nose and a faceless head.

Then the stillness of the room shuddered with the terror of sound—a sound, faint and momentary like the soft scratching of mice.

The window gently opened.

Ellis felt the hot night air on his face, saw the head and shoulders of the man outside moving towards him, and dimly outlined hands on the window-sill.

"Don't make a noise," Dr. Safki whispered. "It's me. I didn't mean to frighten you."

Still stupefied with terror, Ellis somehow or other managed to put on the lamp. The shock of seeing the little Hindu as he saw him now and not as an apparition in the moonlight still caught at his throat, and he lay staring at him, feeling the depth of his own fear, wondering at it.

Dr. Safki poked his head and shoulders through the window, but he made no further effort to come in.

"Where is he?" he whispered, his great black eyes rolling, the whites gleaming.

"Damn you," Ellis snarled. "You scared me out of my wits. What do you want? Why do you come sneaking up to the window like that?"

"Ssshush!" Dr. Safki hissed fearfully. "He'll hear us. Keep your voice down. I saw her. I heard what he said, so I came back to warn you."

Ellis became instantly alert, his own fear dropping from him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, leaning forward. "Warn me about what?"

"Him." Dr. Safki said, looking towards the door. "I knew what he was up to the moment he said she was Julie Brewer. You must get her away from here. Do you understand? Whatever happens you must get her away from here."

"But why?" Ellis asked. The dread in the little doctor's face was contagious. "Speak out, can't you? Tell me. What's he going to do?"

The fat face grimaced; the fat shoulders shuddered.

"I can't tell you," Dr. Safki whispered. "I can't tell you anything. But I beg you to get her away from here. Whatever you do,

get her away." He leaned over the window-sill and waved his pudgy hands at Ellis imploringly. "Don't leave them alone to-night. It's the night that's dangerous: darkness, silence, sleep . . . there's the danger."

Ellis cursed him.

"Speak out, can't you? What will he do?"

A light step sounded outside the door.

Ellis and Dr. Safki became rigid.

"Don't leave him alone with her to-night," Dr. Safki whispered imploringly, and then dropped out of sight as the door opened.

"All alone?" Crane asked as he entered the room. "I thought I heard you talking."

"I'm alone," Ellis said between his teeth, waited.

Crane glanced round the room, looked at Ellis with a half-smile.

"You've been alone practically all day, haven't you?" he said. "Feel like some company for a while?"

He wandered to the open window, looked out, his hands clasped behind his back.

Ellis stared at the starched cuff of Crane's evening shirt, saw a red smear on the white, glossy surface and suddenly felt sick.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

"I SUPPOSE you did that yourself?" Crane said, pointing to the scar on Ellis's face. "That needed courage. I don't think I should have valued my life so highly as to suffer pain and disfigurement. You're a funny little man, aren't you?"

Ellis snarled at him.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "Why can't you leave me alone? I'm ill. Can't you see I'm ill?"

Crane moved away from the window, pulled up a chair close to the bed and sat down.

"When I was in the R.A.F. I used to listen to your broadcasts in the Mess. We all did. You gave us something to laugh at," he went on. "You did talk the most utter tripe, didn't you? I suppose they gave you the stuff and you just spouted it. What did they pay you, Cushman? Tell me about it. I'm interested."

"I'm not Cushman," Ellis repeated, cold sweat on his forehead. "What gives you that idea?"

Crane smiled. "It's your voice," he said. "It's unmistakable. Why are you frightened? I'm not going to give you away. I don't believe in this so-called justice. After all, it's only another form of revenge. You're harmless now, Cushman. There's nothing you can do except run and hide. If I handed you over to the police they'd hang you. What's the point of that? You're entitled to your dreary little life. I don't believe you realized what you were doing. You haven't the intelligence to work anything out for yourself. I sup-

pose you were browned off with the Army; the Huns offered you a cushy job; you thought they were on the winning side, so you threw in with them. Any weak-minded fool without a sense of duty or a feeling for his country would have done the same." He laughed suddenly, throwing back his head. "I'm the last person to talk about a sense of duty. We've all a traitor within us. Do you remember what Safki said? I don't believe in law and order. I believe we should all have an opportunity to work out our own destinies. I think it is dangerous to curtail an emotion, to suppress any so-called criminal impulse. I believe that it causes harm to one's being to attempt to sublimate sex. I don't believe in right and wrong. I think they are man-invented in order to run this hidebound social system of ours successfully. We're supposed to have free will; well, then let's have it. If someone steals my overcoat, I'll steal someone else's overcoat. If someone murders my brother, I'll murder his sister. Don't you agree?"

"What's the idea?" Ellis said, glaring at him. "I tell you I'm not Cushman. I'm David Ellis; so shut up talking rot and leave me alone."

"You disappoint me," Crane said, shaking his head. "I thought my philosophy of life would intrigue you. Most people think I'm joking when I talk like that, but I'm not. The trouble with you is you're scared. You set a value on your miserable little life. All you're worrying about is saving your neck. I'm not going to give you away. Come on, admit it. You're Cushman, aren't you?"

"I'm not!" Ellis said viciously, sitting up in bed, his eyes wild. "I tell you I'm not."

"Safki was out there a moment ago, wasn't he?" Crane said suddenly. "I saw him cross the lawn from the other window."

Ellis stiffened.

"Talk—talk—talk," he said angrily. "That's all you do. First, it's one thing; then it's another. I'm not going to listen to you."

"He told you to get her out of the way, didn't he?" Crane went on. There was a jeering expression in his eyes. "But how can you? You can't get yourself out of here, let alone her."

Ellis clenched his fists furiously. He wanted to sink his nails in the fleshy, sneering face.

"You leave her alone," he said, struggling to keep his voice steady. "I'll fix you if you touch her."

"Don't be dramatic," Crane said, taking out his cigarette-case. "You can't do anything. Even if you could stand you wouldn't have an earthly with me. I could break your back across my knee without turning a hair." He took a cigarette, offered the case to Ellis.

White with rage, Ellis struck the case from his hand. The case shot across the room, and cigarettes spilled on to the carpet.

"You have got rotten manners," Crane said reprovingly. He lit his cigarette, dropped the match out of the open window. "Why can't you discuss all this without getting into a wool? I've been

looking forward all day to talking to you. For goodness sake, man, relax and behave like a normal human being."

Ellis controlled himself.

"You're up to some dirty game," he said. "But I warn you, if you hurt her I'll make you pay for it."

"There's nothing you can do. There's nothing poor Safki can do either. I know too much about both of you," Crane returned, leaning back in his chair and smiling. "If he gives me away, I'll give him away. He knows what's going to happen, but he's powerless to stop it because he values his hide too much. You'll be in a similar position. The way this is working out amuses me. You see, I don't care what happens to myself. I know, sooner or later, someone will find out what's going on, and then I shall be for it, but I'm having a grand run for my money and I'm going on until I'm caught." He blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling, grinned at Ellis. "I don't put a value on my life: not like you and Safki. If I was told I was going to die to-morrow I wouldn't give a damn. It's the immediate present that matters: the future is too uncertain. I've always lived like that, and as I get older I care less what'll happen to me."

Ellis eased himself further down in the bed. He was puzzled; scared, not knowing how to deal with this man.

"Can't you speak out?" he said at last. "You're talking in riddles. What have you done? What are you going to do?"

Crane laughed. "Getting curious at last, are you?" he said. "Well, it's only fair that as I've enough on you to get you hanged you should have the same advantage over me. I don't care if you give me away, Cushman, but you'd care a great deal if I gave you away, wouldn't you?"

"I'm not Cushman," Ellis said obstinately. "I keep telling you that."

"You're so afraid of your mean, rotten life, aren't you? And so's Safki. You're both rather slimy little people. You're a traitor and Safki's a clumsy, unsuccessful abortionist. He has four deaths on his conscience."

Ellis then realized why Safki was frightened to speak out. So that was it, he thought. Crane had him where he wanted him: had Ellis where he wanted him too.

"You talk too much," was all he said. "If I was Cushman, and I'm not, I wouldn't tell you. What do you think I am—crazy?"

"They'll have your fingerprints," Crane said, shrugging his massive shoulders. "I have only to call the police and tell them I think you're Cushman. They'd check up quick enough as soon as they heard your voice. Would you like me to do that?"

Ellis snarled at him.

"Can't you leave me alone? If I am Cushman, what does it matter to you?"

"Ethically, nothing at all," Crane replied, stubbing out his cigarette on the window-sill. "But as a materialist, I am interested.

You see I have to be reasonably sure that you can't make things difficult for me. If I know you are Cushman, then I hold the whip hand. Now, I tell you what I'll do. I'll telephone Major-General Franklin-Steward. He's the Chief Constable. I know him well, and I can ask him for a description of Cushman. I might even hint I know where he can put his hands on him. Old Franklin-Steward is a regular war-horse when he's roused. He loathes traitors and would come after you like a shot. Suppose I do that and then we'll know how we stand?"

"All right," Ellis said, looking past Crane out of the window. He was suddenly sick of this feinting. The fellow had him anyway. If he was determined to find out who he was he could do it. "I'm Cushman." It was almost a relief to admit it. "Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"It's taken you long enough to make up your mind, hasn't it?" Crane said; there was a calculated, sly look in his eyes. "I told you before, I'm not going to give you away. I don't care what happens to you; and if you behave yourself, there's no need for anyone to know that you're here."

Ellis studied him, decided he meant what he said. He couldn't make the fellow out. There was something furtive, sly about him, and he talked so oddly.

"Well, now you've admitted being Cushman I can tell you something about myself," Crane went on, leaning back in the chair and crossing his legs. "I'll be interested to hear your reactions. I don't get much chance of talking about myself. Safki was the last person I talked to. He was most interesting; had all kinds of scientific ideas about me. Of course you're different. You're not well-educated, haven't many ideas, but I suppose you're of average intelligence. You may be able to throw some light on the business."

Ellis made an impatient movement.

"Why must you go on and on? Speak out. Don't beat about the bush so much. What are you up to?" he said angrily.

"I'm interested in death," Crane said, smiling. His eyes had darkened and, in spite of his effort to appear nonchalant, he was suddenly keyed up, tense, unsure of himself. "Does that seem strange to you."

"Your own death?" Ellis asked, suddenly alert.

Crane shook his head. "Oh no," he said. "My own death doesn't matter to me at all. I don't care when I die or for that matter how I die. No, I'm interested in the death of women."

There was a long pause. Ellis felt a chill run down his spine. "What are you trying to tell me?" he said at last.

Crane smiled. It was a lop-sided smile and gave his face a strange, frightening expression. "It's intriguing, isn't it? The death of women. I mean exactly what I say. My principal interest is to take a woman's life. I'm what the newspapers call a monster. Interesting, isn't it?"

Ellis, startled by the expression on Crane's face and by what he had said, blurted out, "You mean you kill women?"

"Oh, come," Crane said, lighting another cigarette. "Use your intelligence. I don't go in for it in a wholesale way, you know. I don't get the opportunity. You have no idea how difficult it is to find a girl who has no parents or relations who'll ask awkward questions. And besides there's always the police. . . . No, not in numbers—yet. But when the opportunity arises I take it." He blew smoke towards Ellis, waved his hand airily. "To date I have only killed one woman; not much to boast about, I know, but in a day or so, I hope to kill another."

"You mean—Grace?" Ellis asked, aware that his heart was thumping against his ribs.

Crane regarded him for several moments before he replied. His face was now set, pale, mask-like. His eyes were dark and seemed to have receded deep into their sockets.

"Yes——Grace," he said, and smiled.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"EVER since I can remember," Crane said as he poured a liberal amount of whisky into a cut-glass tumbler, "I have been fascinated by death." He held up the bottle, looked inquiringly at Ellis. "Won't you have a spot? It won't hurt you, you know."

"No," Ellis said shortly. His head felt hot, and his leg ached. There was a sick, cold feeling in his stomach. He kept asking himself, "Is he pulling my leg or is he serious? If he's serious (and I believe he is) then he must be mental. Does he really mean to kill Grace or is this a method of torturing me?" The calm, matter-of-fact way the fellow talked made it difficult to believe he was serious.

Crane had left the room for a moment or so to fetch the bottle of whisky, a siphon and two glasses. While he was gone Ellis had made a desperate attempt to get out of bed. He felt he must reach the window to see if Safki was still out in the garden—to beg him not to go away, but the effort was too much for him. He had hoped to have been able to drag himself across the room to the window, but he found he couldn't even get his leg out of bed.

On his return, Crane had looked at him, seen the sweat and the lines of pain on his face, and the disturbed blankets and had smiled jeeringly, but had said nothing.

Now he was sitting by the open window, the glass of whisky in his hand, a cigarette between his thick fingers, his legs crossed. He appeared quite at ease, and he spoke quietly and fluently, not hesitating for a word as if he had rehearsed the story over and over again as an actor learns his part.

"When I was a kid—I suppose I was six years old—my father took me out shooting with him," he began, settling himself further

back in the chair. "I remember how interested I was to see a fine pheasant start from cover, fly swiftly towards a wood, and then drop like a stone when my father shot it. I handled the bird, felt its warmth and limpness, and was delighted that at last I was able to touch it. I had seen so many pheasants in the fields and had always wanted to touch them, but I could never get near them, and now, death had brought the bird within my reach. Can you wonder that death interested me?"

Ellis said nothing. He stared at the big, fleshy face, puzzled and suspicious, hoping that if he were patient, some unmistakable and definite sign of the fellow's insanity would reveal itself.

"You think I'm cracked, don't you?" Crane asked, reading his thoughts. "Well, perhaps I am, but I'm not all that cracked. I have a kink. Safki says I'm a psychopathic case. God knows what that means, but I'm not ready to be put away—not yet, anyway."

Ellis made an impatient movement.

"Oh, get on with it," he said irritably. "Do you think I want to listen to you talk about yourself all night?"

"I can't hurry over it," Crane said almost apologetically. "It wouldn't be fair. Safki said the events in my childhood have an important bearing on my present behaviour. He should know. I believe he's made a study of such cases."

Ellis ran his fingers through his thin, sandy hair. It felt damp. His neck and chest felt damp, too. He realized that for the past minutes he had been sweating violently.

"When I was a little older," Crane went on, "it occurred to me that if I wanted anything that was out of my reach I had only to kill it to own it." He paused, studied Ellis. "This is important. At least, Safki says so. This childish reasoning is the direct cause of my oddity now. Any living thing that was out of my reach had only to die to be within my reach. Do you see? It's simple enough and it worked. For instance, there was a Persian cat that lived next door. I always wanted to stroke it, but it was an unfriendly beast—nervous, probably, and I was never able to get near it. One day, exasperated at being frustrated by the stupid beast, I took a sharp knife and waited for it to come out and sun itself—which it did regularly. When it was stretched out on the lawn I crept to within fifteen feet of it and as it was about to run away I threw the knife at it. I had no idea one could kill a cat so easily, and I enjoyed the hour I spent with it, fondling it, stroking its magnificent coat. Then it became stiff and cold and it frightened me. No one thought I had killed it, although the fuss that was made when it was found warned me I'd have to be very careful in the future."

Out in the darkness an owl hooted and Ellis heard a whir of wings as it flew through the trees.

"They're difficult birds to trap," Crane said, glancing out of the window. "I've only been able to catch one since I've been here. Ugly brutes, but rather intriguing." He tossed his half-smoked cigarette out of the window, thought for a moment and then went

on, "It was remarkable how many animals I killed before I went o school. I learned patience, hiding in the woods, lying still for hours waiting for the right moment to spring. I became a first-class stalker. I was even able to kill birds with my knife as they hopped about the ground looking for worms. It seemed to me then hat my knife was a symbol of power. I was never without it, and when I went to boarding school I took it with me." He drank some whisky, set down the glass. "I had one or two narrow escapes at school. I found my knife not only brought animals within my each, but it also freed me from those who annoyed me. There was one boy who took particular dislike to me and tried to make my life a misery. Well, he didn't succeed. I warned him and then as he persisted I laid wait for him one dark night and stabbed him." Crane smiled. "It was really the funniest thing. I wish you could have seen his face as he rushed bawling to the Matron. He had no idea who had knifed him and he bled like a pig. I had no experience of how to stab anyone in those days and I made a complete hash of it. The point of the knife slid off a rib and merely inflicted a nasty flesh wound." His face suddenly tightened and he added viciously, "I wish I had killed him."

"I don't want to listen to all this," Ellis said. The pain in his leg nagged him and Crane's voice worried him like drops of cold water falling regularly on his head.

"But this will interest you," Crane said, refilling his glass. "It has an important bearing on the present situation. I'll skip over my childhood if it bores you. I think I've established the knife motive by now. You do see how it all began, don't you? Later, girls interested me. You wouldn't believe it to look at me now, but I was scared of them. I found then unapproachable and I was again frustrated. Can you see where this is leading to now? I began to ask myself if they'd scare me when they were dead." He broke off, leaned forward, stared hard at Ellis. There was an uncomfortable pause, then he went on. "One night something happened that has caused all this scheming and planning I have to do now. At least, Safki says so." He fumbled for another cigarette, lit it, threw the match out of the window. Ellis noticed his hand was shaking. "I was sixteen. My father and I had been visiting friends. We were driving home; it was dark and we were late. My father was driving fast—too fast. Coming round a sharp bend in the road we collided with another car. It was a hell of a smash. My father was killed. I was thrown clear and not even scratched. The driver of the other car was thrown clear, too; but she broke her neck." He moved restlessly, his eyes darkening. "I went over to her and made certain she was dead. I was only interested in her. My father's death meant nothing to me. I touched her, and then I knew that a dead woman wouldn't scare me." He tried to smile, but the smile didn't quite come off. Ellis thought he looked horrible; grimacing, trying to appear nonchalant, his hands shaking, and his eyes shifty. "She was a pretty little thing: I suppose about twenty, fair, well dressed,

dainty. There was no blood on her; she might have been asleep."

"All right," Ellis said sharply. "I don't want to listen to details. They wouldn't interest me."

"Please yourself," Crane said. "I won't bore you. Anyway that experience gave me ideas. Those ideas kept coming into my mind but for years I did nothing about them. I was scared of the police for one thing. Then I never seemed to have the right opportunity. There was always something that stopped me. The girl had parents; people knew she had gone out with me; she wouldn't go where I wanted her to go. It wasn't easy, Cushman, but I did succeed in the end. Julie Brewer was tailor-made for the job. I killed her."

"You're lying," Ellis said, catching his breath sharply. "I don't believe a word of this. You're trying to torture me."

"My dear fellow," Crane said, frowning. "Don't be such an egoist. Of course I'm not trying to torture you. I'm interested in your reactions now you know the truth. I killed Julie Brewer, and no one knows about it but Safki and you."

"Safki?" Ellis repeated.

"It was unfortunate for Safki," Crane said, his face a little flushed now and his eyes brighter: the whisky was having an effect on him. "He and I used to play golf together. He amused me. I knew what he was and I made inquiries. I found out enough to have a hold on him. He came to see me and blundered in a moment or so after Julie had expired in a vast pool of blood. (You have no idea how she bled. To look at her you'd have thought she was anæmic, but she made a ghastly mess on my carpet.) Poor little Safki! He was going to give me away at first; wanted to call the police until I persuaded him that it wouldn't be wise. As soon as he knew I was on to him, he piped down very quickly and even helped me get rid of her body."

"And Grace?" Ellis asked, now no longer able to conceal his anxiety.

"Grace?" Crane repeated and laughed. "My dear Cushman, isn't she unbelievable? I've never met such a girl. She's incredible. She must have been bred on twopenny magazines and the movies. It's fantastic the way her mind (if you can call it a mind) works. She believes I fell in love with her the moment I saw her. She does really. Did you ever hear anything so funny?" He roared with laughter, nearly upsetting his glass.

Ellis struggled up in bed, his eyes glittering with fury.

"You swine!" he shouted. "You led her on—made her think that I—I'd like to——"

"Oh, dry up," Crane said, suddenly annoyed. "Don't threaten me, you skinny little puppy. The girl's cracked. As if I'd even look at her twice. I admit I led her on, but I never thought she'd swallow the tripe I handed out. She wants to look after me. Me! What does she know about looking after men? Why, the little idiot can't look after herself."

"So you're not going to marry her?" Ellis said, not knowing whether to be angry or relieved.

"Marry her?" Crane said. "A drudge like her? Good God, no! Who does she think she is, anyway? I'll tell you something," he leaned forward confidentially. "I'm supposed to be marrying the daughter of Major-General Sir Hugh Franklin-Steward, K.C.B., D.S.O., and the rest." He grinned. "She's a real society beauty, cold as ice, repressed as the devil and as dull as ditchwater. It might be fun to stick my knife into her, although it'd be the last woman I'd kill. The old boy would really exert himself to catch me and when roused he's a regular old tiger." He shook his head, grinned. "Still, it's an idea that tempts me. I'd rather kill her than marry her. I told you I don't care what happens to me in the long run, but I want some more fun first."

"And Grace?" Ellis said, scarcely believing Crane was serious. "Let's talk about Grace."

"Well, let's talk about her. She's the most pathetic little fool I've ever met. I couldn't resist pulling her leg. She sucked up everything I said, believed it all, and I crowned it by falling on my knees by the carnation bed and asking for her hand." He laughed again. "Any other girl would have known I was fooling, but not her. I wish you could have seen us. I don't know how I kept my face straight. And the cream of the joke is she—she accepted me," and he went off into a roar of laughter, tears running down his face.

Ellis lay still, watching him.

'I'll kill you for this,' he thought, cold with anger. 'I'll have no mercy on you. I don't care what happens to me, but I'll make you pay, and I'll fix you before she finds out.'

Crane mopped his eyes, put the empty glass on the window-sill, lay back in his chair.

"I haven't been so amused in my life," he confessed. "It's really beyond my wildest dreams. What tickles me is that no one can stop me. You can't. If she came in now and you told her what I've been telling you she wouldn't believe it. She thinks I'm a saint; the greatest lover in the world. She wouldn't listen to you; you can try if you like. It'd tickle me to death to hear what she said."

Ellis said nothing. He knew Crane was right. Grace wouldn't listen to him.

"I'll have my fun with her for a day or so and then——" Crane got to his feet. "Then I'll get rid of her. I suppose I'll have to get rid of you, too, but not in the same way. I'll send you to Safki. He'll look after you. You two can have a nice cosy talk about me. He'll tell you about Julie and you can tell him about Grace. Neither of you can do anything unless you betray yourselves. And I can't see you doing that." He stretched his great frame, grinned at Ellis. "You must admit I've been rather bright. I made up my mind I'd experiment with Grace as soon as I knew she was in trouble. But I didn't think she had a police record. That nearly ruined my plans. I could have, of course, handed you both over to James,

but then I'd have missed my fun. Well, I fooled poor old James properly. Daphne—she's his daughter—was one of Safki's patients once and she knows I know, so she does what I tell her. The way I substituted her fingerprints for Grace's was rather masterly, wasn't it? Old James will never guess in a hundred years that the prints have been changed. It's easy to fool the police if you have a good nerve and use your brains." He looked out of the window, stood for a moment staring into the darkness, then turned. "There was a policeman snooping about the grounds to-night. Rogers—I used to play cricket with him—a harmless, thick-headed fool, and he saw you. I caught him looking through your window." He shot his cuff, looked at the red smear. "There was nothing else for it. I had to get rid of him. You should be grateful, Cushman. I saved your skinny neck."

Ellis, white-faced, tense, said nothing. He watched Crane walk to the door.

"I mustn't keep her waiting any longer," Crane went on. "She's changing. I bet you it'll be a seductive négligée. I've let her have the run of Julie's wardrobe. The little fathead put on the dress Julie wore the night I killed her. It gave me a bit of a shock. I didn't realize I was so sensitive. But she took it off when I told her I didn't like it, and she's getting ready now for the big love scene. I bet her heart is going pit-a-pat and she's imagining she's Joan Bennett or some equally glamorous creature, preparing to throw her love at my feet." He opened the door, smiled humorously at Ellis. "Well, now you know something about me. Think over what I've told you. We'll have another little chat to-morrow." He loitered in the doorway, watching Ellis, who stared back at him with frozen eyes. "Sleep well, Cushman. Don't disturb us for an hour or so. I mustn't keep her waiting. It wouldn't be chivalrous, would it?" He laughed again. "I'll tell you all about it to-morrow." He paused as he was turning away, looked back, added, "so long as she can't see my face I can call her every name under the sun. I find that frightfully amusing. She likes to put her head on my shoulder and then I talk to her, only she doesn't know. You ought to be there to hear me."

Ellis listened to his light tread as he walked down the passage. He heard him open a door, shut it, then the bungalow became strangely still and silent.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

GRACE'S bedroom was lit only by two small shaded lamps which created an intimate, if not a slightly sensual atmosphere, accentuated by a heavy and overwhelming perfume that Grace (without realizing the insidious power of the perfume) had sprayed about the room.

Grace lay on a quilted chaise-longue that stood in the middle of the room. She had on a black, semi-transparent négligée which was entirely unsuited to her youthful innocence, although it set off her figure crudely enough. Her bare feet were thrust into scarlet mules, and her hair was caught up by a narrow scarlet ribbon.

At first glance she looked as if she had stepped out of the pages of *Esquire*, but closer scrutiny revealed she was but a poor imitation of those seductive pages; in truth, she was pathetically apeing a sophisticated siren with little or no success.

She had made up her face with an inexperienced hand; rouge formed two hard circles on her cheeks, her lips, under a heavy smear of lipstick, were grotesque, and her eyelashes were clogged with mascara that made little black marks on her eyelids.

Although she was vaguely aware that something had gone wrong with her efforts to be the sophisticated young woman, worthy of someone as wonderful and as thrilling as Richard Crane, she felt she could do no more, hoping that he would not be critical and would, at least, appreciate her effort to please him. She was nervous, too, and her heart fluttered against her ribs, her mouth was dry and her hands unpleasantly clammy.

He had asked her to be his wife. It was the most unexpected, the most marvellous (as well as the most frightening) thing that had ever happened to her. And after dinner, listening to him talk, seeing the wistful look in his eyes, she had suddenly decided to give herself to him. It was no rash gesture. She had flinched from the idea from the first, but she couldn't think of any other way in which she could show her love and gratitude. She knew that a woman's virtue was her most sacred possession (she hadn't read piles of cheap magazines for nothing); that to give herself to her lover was the greatest sacrifice she could offer. Nothing was too good for Richard. She was his, then, if he wanted her.

So, after dinner, she had excused herself, had gone carefully through Julie's wardrobe, had selected the black négligée as the most beautiful of all the dresses in the cupboard, had spent some time before the mirror fumbling with an extraordinary array of unfamiliar boxes of cosmetics, face lotions, tints, eyebrow pencils and the like, and then, a little uneasy, that she had merely made herself look a fright, had settled down on the chaise-longue to wait for him.

She had left her door half open and she saw Crane come out of Ellis's room and for a moment panic seized her. She wanted to run from the bungalow, to hide from him, but she controlled her shyness, waited, holding her breath.

Without looking in her direction, Crane walked quickly to his room, entered, shut the door.

She stared at the closed door, a feeling of sick disappointment swamping her. Wasn't he coming to her? she asked herself, and got off the chaise-longue to look into the passage.

Then she realized that he was probably changing and instantly

she ran back to the chaise-longue and took up her seductive pose again. What an inexperienced little fool she was, she thought, furious with herself. Naturally, he wouldn't want to make love to her in evening dress, and she felt a wave of hot blood rush to her face at the thought that before long she would be lying in his arms, feeling his lips on hers.

It was more than a quarter of an hour before Crane came from his room. During that time, Grace suffered a torment of uneasiness. Was she doing right? Was she merely following in her mother's footsteps? Surely, since they loved each other, he was entitled to take her if she wished him to do so? She was still undecided, still fearful, when Crane moved leisurely across the passage and looked round her door.

She caught her breath sharply when she saw he was in dressing-gown and pyjamas. He stood in the doorway, looking at her, and she looked back at him as if mesmerized. But there was a kind, humorous smile in his eyes that did much to quieten her fluttering heart and still her quivering nerves.

"Hello," he said. "I thought you'd be in bed fast asleep by now."

"Oh, no," she said, again feeling blood rising to her face. (Had he hoped to find her in bed? Had she done wrong, made it difficult for him, being up?) "I wasn't sleepy. . . ."

"May I come in then?" he asked, still standing in the doorway, "or would you rather I didn't?"

"Oh, no, please," she said, stretched out her hand towards him, changed her mind and hastily withdrew it. "Please don't go away."

He closed the door behind him, wandered further into the room. His nose wrinkled at the smell of the perfume.

"Do you like scent?" he asked, thinking the room stank to high heaven and wondering whether he should open a window.

"Oh, yes," she said, shut her eyes for a moment. "It's lovely in here, isn't it?"

He restrained a grimace with an effort, said it was very nice, came to the foot of the chaise-longue.

'Good God!' he thought, 'she looks like a clown. What in the world has she done to her face?' Aloud, he said, "You look very lovely. I believe you put on that black thing for my benefit, didn't you?"

Grace avoided his eyes, wished her face wasn't so flushed.

"I—I—well, no. I thought . . ." She floundered into silence.

He sat on the foot of the chaise-longue, smiled at her.

"What did you think?" he asked kindly.

She sat up, faced him. Her eyes anxiously searched his face as if to read what was going on in his mind.

"Do you really want to marry me?" she blurted out.

"Well, of course," he said, taking her hand. "There's nothing I want more than you. The moment I saw you . . ."

"Yes, I know. You said that before. But I can't really believe it. I've been thinking. I——I'm a bit of a fool; I know I am. I've no

experience, but I do know that men . . . I mean they don't always want to marry a girl, although they want to—to—make love to her. If you really don't want to marry me . . ." she broke off, looked away.

Crane patted her hand, then took hold of her chin, turned her face so she could see what he was saying.

"Go on, tell me," he said. "Please tell me. If I don't really want to marry you . . . what then?"

"You've been so good and kind to me . . . I—I'd do anything for you in return."

"What makes you think I don't want to marry you?" Crane asked, shifting closer to her.

"I've talked to Ellis. He said I'd disgrace you, that I wouldn't make you a good wife and you'd regret marrying me."

The thick, fleshy fingers closed over her wrist. There was warmth and strength in the fingers, restoring her confidence in herself.

"You should be sorry for Ellis," Crane said gently. "He's in love with you himself. He told me so. You're the kind of girl men lose easily. I know what he is suffering, my dear. He just doesn't know what he is saying."

"In love with me?" Grace repeated, startled. "Oh, but I can't believe that. He has been so horrible to me . . . not like you. No, I can't believe that."

"But he is," Crane said, stroking her wrist. "The poor chap's crazy with jealousy. He'll say anything to stop us marrying. He's actually accusing me now of all kinds of fantastic things." He leaned forward, touched her cheek with his finger-tips. "He says I'm going to murder you."

"But he couldn't be so wicked!" Grace said, starting back. A cold shiver ran down her spine. For some unknown reason she suddenly saw Crane in the kitchen again, the look of abject terror on his face, and heard his voice saying: "I thought you were Julie." She shivered again.

"But he doesn't mean it," Crane said, watching her closely. "The chap's just wild with jealousy. He'd say anything to spoil our happiness. You're not frightened, are you? My dear, you wouldn't be frightened of me?"

She looked into his face, saw only kindness and tenderness there and she seized hold of his hand.

"No, I'm not frightened of you," she said quickly. "I wouldn't believe anything he said, and if you did want to murder me—well, you could." She suddenly held out her arms, said with a catch in her voice, "I do love you so, Richard; you can do anything with me—only, please love me just a little."

"Unbelievable," he thought. "She has a mind like a skivvy. Where in the world did she learn to talk such utter tripe?" But he took her face between his hands and, leaning forward, kissed her on the mouth.

For a second or so her mind struggled against the temptation

to yield to him. She remembered her mother; felt again the sting of the razor-strop that had beaten into her the knowledge that adultery was an unforgivable sin. She tried to stiffen her body in resistance, tried to shake her head, tried to draw back. She felt the thick fingers sliding down her spine, resting on her hips. The hard lips crushed hers, drawing the strength out of her. Then, vanquished, she let herself go, became limp in his arms.

He was holding her tightly now, one hand on her knee, the other pressed firmly against the small of her back. She was caught up to him, helpless, yielding to his strength, not knowing what he was going to do next, but instinctively feeling that this was only the beginning of a moment of supreme rapture. Then quite suddenly, it dawned on her that something had gone wrong, that his lips were no longer pressing against hers; that his hand now merely hovered on her knee, and the firm, warm grip on her back had slackened. She had a feeling that he was allowing her to fall, was withdrawing from her.

She opened hurt, reproachful eyes and saw him looking down at her with an intent expression as if he didn't see her; wasn't even aware of her, and as she looked at him, he frowned, pursed his lips and raised a warning finger to silence her.

Her resentful sense of disappointment gave place to anxiety.

"Don't talk," he said, his lips close to hers. "There's someone outside. I heard a sound—as if someone was crawling on hands and knees to the door."

Her eyes changed from frustrated surprise to horror. Her fingers gripped his wrists.

"Crawling?" she mouthed, without making a sound.

He nodded, listened, his hand now against her lips.

"I'm going to see," he said softly. "Don't be frightened. I won't let anyone hurt you."

"No," she said from behind his hand, her eyes wide with alarm. "You mustn't! You may get hurt. . . ."

Impatiently he pulled away, stood up and took two quick, silent steps to the door. He stood listening, his head against the panel. Grace, watching him, suddenly thought how dangerous and menacing he looked standing there so still and tense.

She slid off the chaise-longue, moved a few steps, stopped, watched.

Crane gently turned the door-handle, pulled the door open a few inches. He peered into the hall, stiffened.

With her hand to her mouth, Grace moved forward until she was at his side. Her heart thumped so violently she thought it would suffocate her. Crane's hand sought and found her wrist; the thick, warm fingers comforted her. He opened the door a few more inches, pointed into the hall.

Ellis was out there on the floor. He had reached up and had pulled the telephone directory off the hall table and was now going through its pages with trembling, eager fingers. His face was the colour of

old tallow. His hair was dark with sweat, the black and gold pyjama jacket stuck to his thin back, and Grace could see the ridges of his spine like a string of misshapen marbles.

Crane, still holding Grace's wrist, watched him, saw him give a triumphant gesture as if he had found what he had been searching for in the directory, then he pushed the book away, reached for the telephone.

Moving like a great, silent cat, Crane crept up to him, took the telephone from him as Ellis was about to lift the receiver.

"You shouldn't be out of bed, you know," Crane said gently, and smiled.

Ellis lay still for a moment, his face bloodless: livid with frustrated rage and fear, then he gave a kind of scream, like an animal in agony, and grabbed hold of Crane's ankles, his nails tearing at Crane's flesh. Bending his head, Ellis then tried to fasten his teeth into Crane's leg and would have succeeded had not Crane bent down and caught hold of his wrists and, without effort, pried Ellis's fingers from his ankles. He twisted Ellis's hands behind him, knelt down, peered into his face.

"My dear chap," he said sternly, "what's the matter with you? You're behaving like a lunatic and you're frightening Grace."

"Damn you!" Ellis shouted wildly, unable to move: helpless in Crane's crushing grip. "Let me go! I'll kill you for this. You won't touch her. I won't let you touch her."

Crane glanced over his shoulder at Grace, shrugged as he met her startled gaze.

"You see what I mean?" he said. "He's either cracked or very ill indeed. What do you think I should do with him?"

As Grace came into the light, Ellis turned to her.

"He's going to kill you," he said feverishly. "You've got to listen to me. He's boasting about what he's going to do to you. Your only chance is to get out of here at once. He'll kill you as he killed the other woman. He's mad. Don't you understand . . . he kills for the fun of it."

Grace knelt beside him, a look of pity on her face.

"You're ill," she said gently. "You mustn't excite yourself. He wouldn't hurt me. Why, he loves me and I love him. Please don't say such wicked things."

"It's the truth," Ellis gasped, his control going. "He plans to kill you, you trusting little fool. Leave him! Run! Get out! He's a killer. Don't you understand?"

Grace shrank away from his wild, despairing eyes.

"You're wicked to say such things. He loves me. . . ."

Ellis turned on Crane.

"You rotten swine," he sobbed hysterically, and his face seemed to fall to pieces. He began to cry weakly; tears ran down his wasted cheeks. "You've tricked her into believing in you, but you won't do it. I'll stop you somehow. You won't hurt her. I swear you won't."

"Now, come on, old chap," Crane said soothingly. "You get back to bed. No one's going to hurt anyone. You've been having a nightmare. You're ill and tired. I'll look after you. You come to bed."

Still holding his wrists firmly, Crane lifted Ellis in his arms.

"I'll be as gentle as I can," he said. "And you mustn't worry about Grace. She'll be all right. I'm going to make her very happy."

As he carried him across the hall, Ellis screamed at Grace: "Run, you little fool, run!"

"She won't run," Crane said softly. "She says she'll do anything for me. I have her on a hook, Cushman. You might just as well save your breath."

Ellis spat in his face.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

GRACE awoke with a start. She had been dreaming. She had dreamed that Crane had come to her room and had made love to her. She had been swept away in the ecstasy of the moment, holding him in her arms, her face against his, his body close to hers. She felt his strong fingers caressing the nape of her neck, sending waves of blood down her spine; and then without warning, his fingers suddenly shifted to her throat and fastened into her flesh with savage ferocity, choking her. She realized with indescribable terror that Ellis had somehow taken Crane's place and was there beside her, his mean little face contorted with murderous fury as his hands tried to squeeze the life out of her. It was then that she awoke, her heart hammering against her side, and she was too frightened even to open her eyes.

She lay there for some minutes until she realized with relief that she had been dreaming, and by then, she was fully awake. She sat up, looked at the luminous clock that stood on her bedside table. It was a quarter to two.

Still nervous, she looked around the familiar room. She had drawn back the curtains before going to bed and the moonlight was sufficiently bright for her to see the outlines of the furniture and a faint gleam from the mirror.

Reassured, she lay back, snuggled down in bed again and closed her eyes, but her heart was still bumping against her side and she was still on edge.

What a frightening little creature Ellis was, she thought. He had spoilt everything. Crane had got him into bed with the greatest difficulty, had made him take a sedative. He was so good and kind to Ellis. Even to Grace, who was soft-hearted enough, Crane's gentleness was something to wonder at.

"I'll sit with him," he said to Grace. "You get off to bed. I'm sorry, my dear, but we know we shall have other nights together.

We must be patient," and he had taken her hands, drawn her to him and kissed her.

She had gone to bed and for some time had lain awake wondering what was going on in Ellis's room. She could, of course, hear nothing, and towards midnight, unable to lie in bed any longer, she had slipped on a silk wrap over her orange and red pyjamas and had gone to her door.

Ellis's room was just down the passage, the door was ajar and the light was on. She crept to the door, peered into the room.

Crane was lying back in a big, easy chair, a cigarette between his lips, his head thrown back. He seemed to be studying the complicated pattern on the ceiling or else lost in thought. The moment she appeared, however, he jerked round, tense, alert, but when he saw her he relaxed, signed to her to keep quiet and leaving his chair, he came quickly to her, pushed her gently into the passage and closed the door.

"He's asleep now," he said in a low voice. "The poor chap's worn out. You see how hysterical he is. I suppose it's his fever. If he's not better by to-morrow morning, I'll have to send for Dr. Safki again."

"Must you stay with him?" Grace asked.

"Oh, I think so. He's a bit cracked, you know, and if he woke up and found himself alone he might—well, I don't know what he might do."

She shivered.

"But aren't you tired?" she said, touching his sleeve tenderly. "Shouldn't you try to sleep?"

He smiled. "I'm all right. I don't need much sleep. You get back to bed." Now that she had washed the muck off her face, he was surprised to find that she was quite an attractive little thing in her silk wrap, her hair loose on her shoulders and her face slightly flushed from the warmth of the pillow. "Come on, I'll tuck you in." He put his arm round her, picked her up. 'She's no weight,' he thought, 'but she's got a marvellous little figure. I wonder if I dare leave that stupid brute for a little while?' But he resisted the temptation. If Ellis woke and found himself unguarded he might use the telephone again and then everything would be ruined. No; to-morrow he would get rid of him; make Safki take him off his hands, then he could give his undivided attention to this slip of a girl: she might prove more amusing than he had at first thought.

He carried her into her room, lowered her on to the bed. "Come on; off with your wrap and into bed. I'm going to get you something to drink. You must sleep now, otherwise you'll be tired out by to-morrow."

He went away and Grace, slipping into bed again, felt a new wave of love for him. No one could be kinder, she thought. How could Ellis say such wicked things?

He had given her a cup of tea and an Aspro.

"It'll make you sleep," he said as he turned to the door. "I'll get back to my patient. Sweet dreams, my dear."

She had slept; and now, awakened by the nightmare, she realized that she was not likely to sleep again. She lay in the semi-darkness, looked back on the past few days and marvelled at the change in her life. It was a fairy tale, she thought, and if only Ellis hadn't been here, Crane would have been lying by her side. She suddenly hated Ellis: he was at the bottom of it all. It was he who was spoiling their happiness. Why couldn't he get well and go? She was sure that until he had gone they couldn't hope to begin life together.

She suddenly wanted to see Crane again, and slipping out of bed she crept from her room, down the passage to Ellis's room. The light was still on, but looking round the half-open door, she was surprised to see the big easy chair empty.

She hesitated, wondered if she should go back for her wrap, then decided to have a peep round the door to see if he was by the window. Stealthily she moved into the room, met Ellis's anxious eyes. As soon as she saw he was awake and that Crane wasn't in the room, she took a hasty step back.

"Don't go," Ellis implored, not moving. "Please come in. I must talk to you."

She looked at him from around the door.

"I don't want to talk to you," she said, suddenly feeling cold. "I'm going back to bed." Then she asked, "Where is he?"

"Out in the garden," Ellis said softly. "He thought I was asleep. I knew he had to go some time, so I waited; pretended I was asleep. He's burying the policeman."

"What do you mean?" Grace asked, startled.

"A policeman came here to-night," Ellis said, speaking rapidly, as if afraid he would be interrupted at any moment. "The chap who ran after you on the golf course. His name's Rogers. He came here and saw me. He looked through the window."

"Oh!" Grace cried, her hand going to her mouth. "He saw you? Then he . . ." she broke off, unable to complete the thought that had entered her mind.

"Yes, he saw me, but Crane spotted him as he was crawling across the lawn. He knew the copper would get help and arrest us, so he killed him."

Grace stared at him blankly for a second or so, then her face flushed. "Is there no end to your lies?" she exclaimed, stung to anger. "First you say Richard wants to kill me and now, he's killed the policeman. How can you? What good do you think it will do to lie like that?" She twisted and untwisted her hands, plunged on, "Richard says you love me. Well, I'm sorry for you, but I can't love you. You're making me hate you with all your lies. I can't love you. I'm Richard's. Can't you see that?" She came further into the room, forgetting in her agitation that she was wearing only a semi-transparent pair of pyjamas. "Please stop saying these awful things. I don't believe them. I never will believe them."

"He killed him with the knife—the same knife he killed Julie

Brewer with," Ellis said, watching her closely. "He's out in the garden, burying him now. Go and see if you don't believe me—catch him in the act, and when you've seen him, go: run for your life. Never mind about me. I don't care what happens to me: I'm past caring. It's you I want to save."

"But Julie killed herself," Grace cried, beating her hands together. "How can you say such wicked things? He told me how it happened and I believe him. I wouldn't believe anything you said. You're wicked!"

"And he told me, too," Ellis went on, waving her to silence. "He stood there and boasted about it. He's mental. He admits it. He's interested in the death of women. That's what he says. Safki knows, but he can't do anything to stop him because Crane has a hold over him. Crane got Julie down here and killed her. Safki walked in on them as Julie was dying. Ask Safki if you don't believe me. That's why Crane's sheltering us. He's after you. To-morrow he's getting rid of me. I'm going to Safki's place, and then he'll have you on his own. When he's amused himself with you, he'll kill you."

"How can you invent such lies?" Grace demanded, her voice rising. "I won't listen to you. I don't believe you. No one would believe you."

"He says you're incredible—unbelievable. He thinks you've been bred on twopenny magazines and the movies. He thinks you're cracked. He calls you a drudge, and he's going to marry the daughter of some big-wig with a lot of decorations."

Disgusted, Grace turned away.

"I think you must be mad," she said. "And I hate you. Don't ever speak to me again. I've had enough of you and I'll tell Richard that I'm not coming near you."

Ellis raised his clenched fists above his head. It was hopeless. Scragger was his only hope. He had found Scragger's name in the telephone directory, and was on the point of calling him when Crane had stopped him. If he could only get to the telephone again, he could still save her.

"All right, don't believe it," he said, controlling his voice. "I'll save you in spite of yourself. But go into the garden. You'll find him out there." Then he lost control of himself, shouted wildly at her, "That might convince you, you stupid, brainless, trusting little bitch!"

She went out of the room immediately, but outside, she paused and then came back.

"I am going out," she said quietly, "but only because I feel he needs me. But I don't trust you, so I'm going to lock you in," and she took the key from the lock and slipped it in the other side of the door.

Ellis, his face contorted with alarm and fury, tried to lift himself.

"Don't!" he shouted. "Don't lock me in. I must use the telephone. I've got to use the telephone."

"Richard doesn't want you to use the telephone," Grace said quietly, closed and locked the door behind her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE high full moon shed its brilliant light over the garden. There was no wind and the air was still and hot: a silent, lovely summer night.

Grace stood on the front step looking across the lawn, hoping to catch sight of Crane, but she couldn't see him, nor could she see any movement on that vast tidy stretch of grass, nor in the long, orderly flower beds, full of summer blooms. The scent of the flowers was heavy on the night air, and in the distance, against the high brick walls that surrounded the garden, the laurels and rhododendrons formed black patches of mysterious darkness. To the left of the house was a dense thicket of fir trees and evergreens. If Crane was really in the garden as Ellis said he was, then he must be somewhere in the thicket, Grace decided, after examining the open ground before her. She turned back to the hall, opened the hall cupboard and took out a light tweed coat she had noticed there during the day. She slipped it on over her pyjamas, closed the front door, and walked quickly across the lawn to the thicket.

She went to meet Crane, not because she believed what Ellis had told her, but because she could no longer bear to be in the bungalow alone with Ellis. She wanted to find Crane, to receive his assurances, to tell him what Ellis had said, to beg him to get rid of Ellis before he spoilt their happiness.

How wicked he was! she thought angrily. How could he invent such stories? At the back of her mind, although she would not let it become more than a half-formed thought, she was dismayed most by Ellis saying that Richard was going to marry the daughter of an important man. She was sure it had been a cruel lie, calculated to hurt her, but lie or no lie, she was distressed. Richard should marry someone worthy of him: not a thief, a convicted felon. She wanted to tell him: to beg him to think twice, and of course, hoped he would tell her he wished for no one but her.

At the wooden gate, leading to the thicket, she paused. It was dark in the thicket and she wished now she had brought an electric torch. She had been that way with Crane during the afternoon. In daylight it was a delightful spot: narrow paths bordered by high trees, flowering shrubs and climbing roses decorating the big, natural lake in the centre of the thicket. Beyond the lake was a glen that Crane told her was full of bluebells and daffodils in the spring. Beyond the glen was a narrow, twisting path that disappeared into

a dense wood. He had turned back when they had come to that path, saying that they had gone far enough.

She wondered where he was in the thicket, hoped that he had a light by which she could find him. Being deaf, it didn't cross her mind to call to him.

She passed through the wooden gate, into the darkness. Her feet trod the well-worn path, and whenever she strayed from it, she stumbled on the edge of the thick grass, paused, got back on to the path and went on.

She walked for some time in total darkness, and as she went on and on, she became uneasy (Had she lost her way? Was she walking in circles?) She stopped; darkness and silence surrounded her. She looked up. High above the trees she could make out the dim light of the moon coming through the thick foliage. She looked back over her shoulder, saw only blackness, looked before her, to her right, to her left: blackness.

For a moment or so she had to struggle against a feeling of suffocation and panic, but pulling herself together, she went on. Richard was somewhere ahead, she thought stubbornly. 'I shall not be alone much longer. Then he and I will find our way back without difficulty.'

A little later she came upon the lake that lay in the moonlight like a glittering mirror, and she stood by the still water, looking towards the glen, hoping to see him; but there was no sign of him.

The glen was a black patch of trees and shrubs, and she hesitated whether to go on or not; whether she should sit by the lake and wait for him to come to her, but knowing that a path ran round the lake she realized that he might return by the far side of the lake and miss her. She decided to go on.

She waited a moment or so, hoping that he would come. There was something final and frightening about the path ahead of her. It scared her. She wondered if bats hung from the trees and would drop on her; if an owl would fly at her, its great saucer-like eyes snapping fire of annoyance. She pulled the tweed coat closer about her, walked slowly towards the glen.

The ground sloped away under her feet and she walked heavily, digging her heels into the mossy path. She felt as if unseen hands were pushing her forward, and twice she stopped, hesitated, and looked back at the lake, wishing to return, but each time, going forward, now intent on finding Crane, also realizing that she hadn't the courage to face the darkness of the thicket alone on the return journey.

In the glen, she again paused. The moonlight came through the trees and lit the carpet of soft grass, the climbing roses, the wild orchids and the rhododendrons that flowered there.

It was an enchanting spot even at night, and it gave her courage to go on. She went on, through the glen towards the twisting path that led to the wood. At the foot of the path, she came to an uneasy halt. Perhaps he wasn't there at all, she thought. Was it worth while

going further? She was like a child in a fairy tale about to enter a forest full of strange creatures, witches and dragons. She felt small and defenceless beside the tall trees, but she did go on after a struggle with herself, although she moved a step at a time, ready to retreat at the first movement in the undergrowth.

But nothing alarmed her, and she went on and on, until, looking back, she realized that she was now completely swallowed up by the dense wood, and, for all she knew, she might have wandered into an endless tunnel and was now miles under the ground. The moment that thought entered her head, she became panic-stricken, and she sank to the ground, petrified, her heart hammering against her ribs.

She remained on the soft mossy ground for some time, struggling to control her fears. She must go back, she told herself. By keeping her eyes closed, she managed to shut out the terror that seemed to lurk around her. "There's nothing to be frightened of," she said, half aloud. "All I have to do is to retrace my steps to the lake, and then rest there until Richard comes to look for me. I must return to the lake."

But when she opened her eyes and found herself still in the hot, silent darkness, fear again laid hold of her. She scrambled to her feet, took a hesitating step forward and then stopped. In the distance, right ahead of her, she saw a faint gleam of light. At first she couldn't believe it, but looking again, she knew she hadn't been mistaken.

Instantly her fear left her. Richard was just ahead. She had been right to come; a fool to have been scared. She hurried forward, each step bringing her nearer the light.

As she rounded the bend of the path, she saw, a hundred yards or so ahead, a storm lantern, set down in the middle of the path, but there was no one in sight: no Richard.

She reached the lantern, picked it up, looked around; holding the lantern above her head, trying to see further than its bright rays could penetrate.

She was now alarmed; no longer afraid for herself, but afraid for Richard. Something must have happened to him, she thought wildly. He must have slipped and hurt himself and had crawled into the undergrowth before losing consciousness.

In the light of the lantern she could see how wild and lonely this spot was. Thick shrubs bordered the path; great, gnarled trees, centuries old, leaned over threateningly, their branches but a few feet above her head. The grass was long and tangled, the weeds and nettles and ivy choked the undergrowth.

She was about to call out, when she saw something that froze her into silence. From beneath a thick bush, a man's boot protruded.

"Richard!" she screamed, starting forward. "Richard! Are you hurt?" and she dropped on hands and knees to peer under the bush. She saw a trouser leg and then a hand, and she reached out, seized the hand. But the moment her fingers touched it, she knew

she was touching dead flesh, and she snatched her hand away, her body recoiling with a violent start, her heart skipping a beat.

The full force of the discovery didn't strike her for a moment or so. She knelt before the hand, stupefied with horror. Then it dawned on her that Richard was dead, and she screamed frantically, sprang to her feet and ran wildly down the path into the darkness.

Her screams echoed through the woods; disturbed the birds, startled the foxes in their holes, but she wasn't even aware she was screaming.

Half way down the path, she realized she was running blindly in the dark and she stopped, looked back at the distant light of the lantern. She must get the lantern and then get help. Richard was dead! Nothing mattered now. She couldn't leave him there. She would have to tell someone; get whoever it was to carry him to the house. *Safki!* Of course! Safki must help her.

Sobbing distractedly, she retraced her steps, reached to pick up the lantern, then paused. She remained half bent over the lantern, her heart frozen, fear taking hold of her in icy fingers.

Just in front of her, something moved: a dim shape seemed to rise out of the ground and tower over her. Strange animal-like eyes shone in the lantern light.

She couldn't move nor utter a sound. She remained petrified, a figure carved in stone.

Crane came out of the bushes, caught hold of her arms, pulled her against him, looked down into her glazed eyes.

"I'm afraid I frightened you," he said gently and smiled. "I'm so very sorry, my dear."

She clutched his coat in both hands, felt her inside heave, and a cold sweat break out all over her body. Her knees gave under her, and if he had not held her tightly, she would have fallen. She lost consciousness, sank into a dark pit of faintness.

He was still holding her when the faintness went away. She was lying on the ground, her head pillowed on his knees, his hands holding hers.

She looked up at him, saw the kind, humorous smile in his eyes, relaxed with a sigh of relief.

"I thought you were dead," she said and began to cry. "Oh, Richard, I was so frightened."

"Of course you were, my dear," he said, stroking her hands. "You shouldn't have come into the wood. Why did you come?"

"I wanted you," she said. "Ellis was saying such beastly things . . ." She suddenly sat up, clutched his arm. "That man! He's dead! I thought it was you!"

Crane pulled her back against him.

"Don't be frightened," he said. "I didn't want you to know."

She remembered what Ellis had said: *Crane spotted him crawling across the lawn. He knew he'd get help and arrest us, so he killed him.*

"Is it the policeman?" she asked, staring at him in horror.

Crane nodded.

"You killed him?" Grace said, clutching at his sleeve and shaking it. "You killed him?"

There was a watchful expression in his eyes now. "Did Ellis say so?"

"Yes." Her hand unconsciously continued to shake his sleeve.

"It was an accident," Crane said. "I only wanted to save you. I didn't really kill him He was looking in Ellis's room. You were there, too. I could see he recognized you both. I crept up to him and knocked him on the head. But as he fell—he had a knife in his hand (perhaps he was going to open the window with it)—he fell on the knife."

"You hit him?" Grace gasped.

"I thought we'd have time to make a bolt for it," Crane said. "I'll never forgive myself. I wanted you, my dear. I couldn't bear the thought of being parted from you. I didn't hit him hard . . . but he fell on the knife."

She believed him instantly, and slipping her arms round him, she hugged him to her.

"You're so good to me," she sobbed. "I don't know how I can repay you. Is there nothing you won't do for me?"

He grinned bleakly in the darkness, ran his fingers through her hair, then he raised her face so she could see what he wanted to say to her.

"I'm going to bury him. I was digging a grave for him when I heard you scream. They'll never find him in this wood. All we have to do is to sit tight. It's the only thing to do. To-morrow I'll get rid of Ellis, then you and I can get out of the country—go to Switzerland or America."

"But they'll find him," she said, terrified. "They always do."

He pushed her gently from him.

"Don't be frightened. Trust in me," he said. "Now, wait here while I bury him. I won't be long."

"I must help you," she returned, shivering. "It was my fault. I can't expect you to do that alone."

He made a slight, impatient movement which she did not notice.

"Please stay here," he said, an edge to his voice. "I can do it, and I don't want you near."

He went away and left her with the lantern and she waited for a long time. She sat on the grass, her head in her hands, unable to believe that this awful thing had happened. He had killed a man! He had done that to save her. It had been her fault, and now he was in danger.

These thoughts revolved in her mind until he returned. She happened to look up and saw him as he came down the path, out of the darkness. There was mud on his shoes and on the ends of his trousers. There was mud on his hands.

She started to her feet, then paused. There was something strange

about his eyes that frightened her. He came to her, took hold of her. She was startled by the roughness of his grip and by the heaviness of his breathing. He pulled open her coat almost dragged it off her, then he jerked her against him, his mud-stained hand closing round her chin, lifting her face to his.

She saw in his eyes what he meant to do, and she cried out, "Oh, no! Please, not here!" but he didn't seem to hear for he crushed his mouth down on hers.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

CRANE stood by the open dining-room window, his hands in his pockets, a heavy, thoughtful frown on his face. The bungalow was strangely silent, and nothing in the garden stirred under the hot midday sun.

Grace was having a bath. She had slept late, and he hadn't seen her since the previous night. He had heard her go to the bathroom but a few minutes ago, and he wondered how she was feeling; whether she was going to be difficult.

He had been in to see Ellis whose small, hard eyes had never left Crane's face for a moment: revengeful, vicious eyes. He hadn't spoken, although Crane had tried to make conversation, and losing patience, Crane had left him. He had then tried to contact Safki, but the telephone remained unanswered. This had irritated Crane as he wanted to get rid of Ellis without any further delay. He was suddenly bored with Grace and Ellis; he wanted to bring this affair to an abrupt close.

His big hands clenched in his pockets. To-night he would finish Grace and bury her beside Rogers and Julie, out there in the lonely wood. He felt his blood quicken at the thought, and the old familiar feeling he knew so well came back, fastening on to his mind, swamping all other feelings and thoughts.

But first, he had to get rid of Ellis, and he turned from the window, intending to ring Safki again, but a movement outside arrested his attention. He again glanced out of the window, felt his heart miss a beat.

From where he stood he could look down the long drive to the big wooden gates. Standing before the gates was an old-fashioned Rolls-Royce, and even as he saw it, Major-General Sir Hugh Franklin-Steward descended from it, had a word with the chauffeur, opened the gate and began to walk slowly up the drive.

For a moment Crane lost his nerve. He experienced a strange weakness in his legs and the blood left his face. What did the old boy want? He hadn't been near the bungalow for months: and at this hour? Had James been to him? Were they suspicious? Could something have gone wrong?

Crane quickly pulled himself together. No, nothing could have

gone wrong. He was too clever for that to have happened. He had fooled James and was behaving like a fool himself. There was nothing to get excited about. The old boy probably wanted something, or, as he hadn't seen him for a few days, thought he'd call. His confidence returned. This could even be an exciting experience if he played his cards properly. The idea of entertaining the Chief Constable while sheltering a notorious renegade and a wanted convict was fun: would test his nerves, but he'd have to be sure they were safely out of the way first.

Moving swiftly, he went to the bathroom, opened the door, entered.

Grace was just fastening her dressing-gown. Her hair was limp from the steam of the hot water and her face looked young and innocent, free as it was from make-up. There were, however, dark smudges under her eyes and she looked tired as if she had slept badly.

She recoiled slightly as Crane came in, blushed and looked away.

He grabbed her arm, pulling her to him.

"Listen carefully," he said. "The Chief Constable of the district is coming up the drive. I don't know what he's after, but I'm positive he doesn't know you and Ellis are here. Go to Ellis and sit with him. Lock yourself in." He thrust a shot-gun that he had snatched from the rack on the hall wall into her hands. "Threaten him with that if he plays the fool. Now, hurry."

Grace nearly dropped the gun. She trembled, clung to him.

"But I daren't," she stammered. "I—I'm scared. Oh, Richard, suppose they've found out?"

"Get in there and be quiet," Crane said curtly. "He'll be here any second now. Leave it to me. I'll handle him all right. There's nothing to worry about, but keep Ellis quiet."

He bundled her out of the bathroom, down the passage to Ellis's door.

"Lock yourself in and don't make a sound," he said, opened the door and pushed Grace into the room, then closed the door behind her.

As he turned the front door bell rang and he grinned, showing his big white teeth.

'Now for it,' he thought. 'The old fossil won't get the better of me. This should be fun if only that madman Ellis doesn't start something. But he won't he reassured himself. 'He's too scared: values his rotten little life too highly. If he gives me away, he'll hang and he knows it.'

Crane went to the front door, opened it.

"Why, hello, sir," he said, smiling a welcome. "This is an unexpected pleasure. Come in; you're just in time for a drink."

Sir Hugh regarded the frank handsome face thoughtfully. 'Good-looking boy,' he thought. 'James must be out of his mind. This chap wouldn't hurt a fly. Well, damn it, I suppose I'll have to go through with it.'

"How are you, Richard?" he said aloud, shaking hands. "Haven't seen you for more than a week. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"All right, so far, Crane thought, as he led the way to the sitting-room. The old boy looks a bit thoughtful (not his strong suit), but he seems genial enough.

"I've been trying to get my handicap down, sir," he said with a laugh. "But I can't get below three. I've been up at the course nearly every day this week. I hoped to surprise you."

"Three, eh?" Sir Hugh said, selected a comfortable chair, lowered his thin frame into it. "Damn good. I wish I was three. Last time I put in a card they gave me a filthy twelve. Still, I suppose twelve isn't bad at my age."

"I'd have thought you were a good six, sir," Crane said easily. He glanced round the room for the whisky, remembered he had left it with Ellis, cursed under his breath. He could have done with a spot now; oiled the old boy too. Well, there was sherry. He crossed to the cocktail cabinet. "Gin or sherry, sir? I'm afraid I'm out of whisky."

"No, I won't have anything, thank you," Sir Hugh said. "I don't like drinking before lunch. But you have one. Don't let me stop you." He stroked his lean jaw, wondered how he was going to tackle this unpleasant business.

"I've chucked it, too—anyway before lunch," Crane said, thinking he'd better keep a clear head. "How are the roses, sir?" he went on quickly as he saw Sir Hugh hesitating. 'There's something on the old boy's mind,' he thought. 'Better keep the conversation going and make it as difficult for him as I can.'

Sir Hugh's face brightened at the mention of roses, then he realized that if he began to talk about his favourite pastime he'd never get down to business. So he resisted the temptation to extol the prowess of his Sultans of Zanzibar, said, "Never mind about the roses, Richard, there's something I want to ask you."

Then he does know something, Crane thought. Careful now. It must be serious. Never knew the old boy not to rise to the rose bait. What's coming?

"Yes, sir?" he said, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. He noticed with annoyance that his hands were none too steady.

"I understand, Richard, that you claim to have a married sister—a Mrs. Julie Brewer," Sir High began, stroking his jaw and looking thoroughly uncomfortable.

James! Of course, James had reported to Sir Hugh. Now he'd have to go very carefully. It was one thing to tell James that he had a sister, another thing to admit it to Sir Hugh. He was, after all, his future father-in-law, and Sarah (that cold, repressed beauty) would want to meet any sister of Crane's.

He suddenly regretted telling James that Julie was his sister. It had been a hasty, thoughtless move: unwise, with no eye to the future. Well, it couldn't be helped now, but how to get out of it?

"You've been talking to James," Crane said. "What's this, sir? The third degree?"

"No, my boy, but I'm worried. James has come to me with an extraordinary story which involves you," Sir Hugh said, deciding that he'd best lay his cards on the table. He wasn't going to try to trap the lad. He liked Crane; was glad he was going to marry his daughter; was very proud of his war record. He wanted a son; his cold, over-educated daughter rather frightened him. He would have willingly exchanged her for Crane if he had the chance. "James tells me you claim this woman Julie Brewer is your sister, but he has been to Somerset House and finds you have no sister."

'Hell!' Crane thought, 'I didn't expect this.' He controlled his uneasiness with an effort, but his hands suddenly felt moist and cold.

"He has been a busy little bee," he said, smiling. "I'm afraid he's landed me in an awkward hole through his damned prying."

"Oh?" the faded blue eyes looked hurt. "Perhaps you'd better explain, Richard. You're not denying that you said she was your sister?"

"Of course not, sir," Crane said frankly. "And, of course, it was a lie. I haven't a sister."

"Yes, James found that out. He tells me this Brewer woman is—er—a——" Sir Hugh floundered, cleared his throat, shook his head. "I suppose he knows what he's talking about?"

"I'm afraid he does, sir. She is one of those."

"And she was staying here?" Sir Hugh asked, failing to conceal his horror. "A woman like that? But surely not."

"Oh, no, sir," Crane said. "Not here. No—I wouldn't associate with that kind of a woman."

"'Pon my soul, I'm glad to hear it," Sir Hugh said, looking pathetically relieved. "I told that damn fool James you were a clean-living boy." He suddenly realized that the situation as described by James had not been explained, and he blinked at Crane. "But she was here, damn it. You introduced her to James as your sister and showed him her identity card."

"I showed him Julie Brewer's identity card, sir, but the girl wasn't Julie."

Sir Hugh crossed and then uncrossed his long, thin legs. He passed his hand over his bald head, frowned.

"Then who the devil was she?"

"I can't tell you that, sir," Crane said a little curtly. "It's a matter of someone else's honour."

"But you'll have to tell me," Sir Hugh said, frost now in his voice. "James claims that the girl was Grace Clark, wanted by the police."

So he hadn't fooled James after all, Crane thought, dismayed. Well, never mind. He was going to fool Sir Hugh and if he convinced Sir Hugh, James wouldn't dare investigate further.

"Who, sir?" he asked, feigning surprise.

"Grace Clark," Sir Hugh repeated. "You may have read about her in the papers."

"I think I have. You mean the deaf girl? But what in the world . . . I mean why should I . . . oh, really, sir, this is ridiculous."

"It's serious, my boy," Sir Hugh said sternly. "I need an explanation. I must know how you got hold of this Brewer woman's identity card, and who this other woman is who's staying here."

"But she's not staying here," Crane said hastily. "She left last night."

"Well, who was she?"

Crane got up and began to pace the floor.

"This puts me in a very difficult position," he said. "You don't think she's this Grace Clark, do you, sir? You can't believe that?"

Sir Hugh was watching him, puzzled. The boy looked worried: there was something obviously on his mind. Could James be right?

"You still haven't answered my questions, Richard," he said sharply. "You'll have to answer them, you know, or else I'll be forced to pass this business over to the Superintendent to deal with, and you know what that means."

"Good Lord!" Crane exclaimed. "This mustn't go further than us two, sir. It's frightfully delicate." He pretended to hesitate, then sat down again. He had his story now. "All right, sir, I'll tell you. I won't ask you to treat this in confidence, but I hope when you've heard the true facts, you'll do everything you can to hush it up."

"I'm making no promises," Sir Hugh said, becoming more and more worried. "If it's a police matter, the police will have to be informed."

"Oh, I understand that, but it isn't a police matter. First, I'd better explain about Julie Brewer," Crane said. "When I was at Biggin Hill, sir, with my squadron, I met a lad named Ronnie Chadwick ('I'm sorry about this, Ronnie, old boy, but you'll understand. I'm in a hole, and it won't hurt you,' Crane thought). He and I did a number of sorties together and we got pretty pally. The day we were detailed to cover the Dieppe raid, he asked me, if anything should happen to him, if I'd send his things to his mother. Well, of course, I said I would and we kidded each other, not believing anything would happen, but it did. Poor Ronnie bought it. Well, sir, going through his stuff I found he had given a couple of rings to a girl called Julie Brewer. I didn't think anything of it, until his mother wrote to the C.O. asking for the rings. The C.O. passed the buck to me and suggested I'd better have a word with Mrs. Brewer and find out why Ronnie had given her the rings. The next time I was in town I called at the address and found the woman was a tart. Of course she wouldn't part with the rings, and I couldn't very well write to Ronnie's mother and explain. So I decided I'd buy them off her."

Sir Hugh nodded. The frost had gone out of his eyes, and he was looking almost happy again.

"Very good of you, my boy," he said.

"The idea was all right, sir," Crane said modestly, "but it didn't work out. She wouldn't part with the rings until I'd paid the money. Then when I had given her the money, she said she hadn't had time to get the rings from the bank and she'd send them to me. It was an absolute twist, but she was so experienced that she fooled me completely. I did snaffle her identity card as some form of security, but I haven't had the rings and I don't suppose I ever shall."

"I see," Sir Hugh said, light dawning. "Damn it all, my boy, you behaved well. You know the woman's disappeared?"

"Has she?" Crane said in mock surprise. "There goes my five hundred pounds. What a fool I was to have trusted her. I suppose the police . . . no, we'd better not let the police have a go at her. Ronnie's mother might hear about it."

"Very difficult," Sir Hugh said, and blew his nose violently. "Well, you did your best and you tried to help an old comrade. It was a very fine gesture, Richard."

"Well, I haven't finished yet, sir," Crane said, trying to look embarrassed. "I hope you'll be equally pleased with me when you hear the whole story."

"Yes, yes," Sir Hugh said, his face clouding. "Well, get on, my boy. Who was this woman who was staying here? I might add, Richard, that it is a severe blow to me to learn that a woman was with you unchaperoned. I thought you were fond of Sarah."

"Of course I am, sir," Crane said quickly. "More than fond. I hope to marry her as you know. This woman—there was nothing between us, sir. Word of honour. I know it looks bad, but—well, perhaps I'd better begin at the beginning."

"I'm very relieved to hear it, Richard." The faded blue eyes quizzed him. "You've got too much guts to lie yourself out of a tight hole, haven't you?"

"I hope so, sir," Crane said, suppressing an urge to burst out laughing. The old fossil was really unbelievable. He was as bad as Grace. "Well, sir, this is the hard part of the story," he went on, "and I hesitated to—well, frankly, I wouldn't tell anyone except you, sir. It concerns Lady Cynthia Crowbridge."

Sir Hugh stiffened, sat up.

"General Crowbridge's daughter?" he asked, a rasp in his voice.

"Yes, sir. You know she's getting a divorce?"

"Well, what of it?"

"She's fallen in love with a friend of mine, sir, and they couldn't wait. If it got out it'd kill the old boy, sir. You know what a stickler he is for the right thing, and it'd dish Cynthia's divorce. I suppose, in a way, it was my fault, but I was sorry for them. I suggested they could meet at my place. They did and spent several nights here. The King's Proctor would make hay out of it if he knew."

"I suppose he would," Sir Hugh said, rubbing his head again. "This is really frightful, Richard. I wish in a way you hadn't told me."

"I know, sir," Crane said, suppressing a grin, "but you see now what a wretched position I was in. You know how keen Cynthia is about golf—or, at least, I suppose you don't. I was forgetting you don't know her. She plays a terrific game and the little fathead followed me out on the course, determined to have a couple of hits. Well, she ran into Rogers and promptly lost her head. She thought Rogers would recognize her (her picture appears in the *Tatler* every week) and she was supposed to be in London, staying with her aunt, the innocent, broken-hearted wife. So she bolted. Rogers went after her, thinking she was the sneak-thief who'd broken into the clubhouse. I had to do a spot of quick thinking and made out she was deaf and hadn't heard him call. I had hoped, sir, to pull wool over his eyes, but I might have known better. The police here are uncommonly smart."

Sir Hugh beamed.

"Well, 'pon my soul," he said, "this is extraordinary. A storm in a tea-cup, eh? And what the devil am I to tell James? He's waiting to put the handcuffs on you."

'I've won!' Crane thought. 'I've got him!' And he was so relieved that he burst out laughing.

"It's really comic, isn't it, sir," he cried. "Poor old James thought I was aiding an escaped convict."

Sir Hugh grinned sheepishly. "I don't mind admitting, my boy, I was a bit worried myself. Well, we can't let the cat out of the bag, can we? General Crowbridge was one of my chiefs. I wouldn't upset him for the world."

"Perhaps you could tell James you've discussed this with me and that you're satisfied? You don't have to tell him the whole story, do you, sir?"

"No, I don't think so, but wait a minute, Richard, we haven't finished yet. James got Lady Cynthia's fingerprints. Did you know that?"

Crane lost his smile, nodded.

"Yes, and I had to do something about that because, if you remember, sir, Cynthia once visited Scotland Yard (I hope the old boy won't inquire about this) and they took her prints for a joke. I didn't know if they had them on record, but if they had, and told James who she was, it'd have torn it, wouldn't it? So I persuaded Daphne to put her prints on the watch. She's a good kid, and of course, I made it worth her while."

"Very wrong of her," Sir Hugh said, startled. "But I can see why you did it. In fact, Richard, you've behaved uncommonly well."

Crane got up and walked to the cocktail cabinet, poured out two large sherries.

"You won't refuse a drink now, will you, sir? I think we both deserve this. I can tell you I've been worried stiff about the whole thing and am so relieved to have got it off my chest."

Sir Hugh took the glass, frowned at it.

"This fellow Rogers has disappeared," he said, suddenly think-

ing of James. "James says . . . well, of course, it's absolute nonsense now."

Careful, Crane said to himself. You're not out of the wood yet.

"Rogers has disappeared?" he said, paused, went on, "Well, knowing the facts, I'm not surprised."

"Facts?" Sir Hugh asked, startled. "What facts?"

"Here again, this isn't my secret, sir, but I can tell you. I seem to have everyone's secrets thrust upon me. It's Daphne's."

"You mean James's daughter?"

"Yes. I happen to know her fairly well. She came to me the other week. She was in trouble. Rogers had given her a baby."

"Good God!" Sir Hugh gasped, nearly dropping his sherry.

"She was in a bad way, and I spoke to Rogers, but he'd had his fun and had no intention of paying for it. I told him if he didn't do something about it by the end of this week I would report the matter to you. I suppose he lost his nerve and skipped. I don't think we'll hear any more from Rogers, sir."

"And a good thing, too," Sir Hugh said, his face dark with anger. "We don't want men like that in the force. Still, we'll have to find him. Anyway, you did right, my boy. And the girl? What will poor James say?"

"Against my advice, the girl got rid—anyway, sir, she's all right now. She shouldn't have done it, but there it is. Need we tell James? If you said you had heard Rogers had deserted the force and you weren't going to take the matter further, it would save the old chap a lot of unhappiness. He's given a grand contribution to the force, hasn't he, sir? And if you could save him pain, it would be merciful. He does dote on his daughter and it'd be a dreadful blow if the truth came out."

Sir Hugh finished his sherry, stood up.

"You're a good chap, Richard, and I apologize for even having a moment of doubt," he said, putting his hand on Crane's shoulder. "You'll make Sarah a fine husband. You think always of others. I've noticed it before, and I'll say this: you've behaved in all this sad business like a gentleman. My boy, I'm proud of you."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

CRANE stood in the open doorway, looked first at Grace, then at Ellis. They were both tense, but he noticed Grace looked the more frightened of the two. He enjoyed keeping them in suspense, and with a set, expressionless face, he walked into the room, paused, waited for them to speak.

But they said nothing, as if afraid to break the spell of silence.

Unable to contain his jubilation any longer, he burst out, "It's all right! He's gone!" He gave a short, triumphant laugh. "It was like playing a trout and I hooked him. It was marvellous! He

believed everything I said." He pointed at Ellis. "I lied your scraggy little neck out of a rope. I wish you could have heard me. I was terrific. I had an answer for everything. That old devil James found out so much, but bit by bit I pulled his case to pieces, and Sir Hugh's gone off, thinking I'm the nicest and kindest person in the world. He—he says he's proud of me," Crane added and roared with hysterical laughter.

Grace put down the shot-gun she had been clutching, drew in a shuddering breath. Ellis relaxed on his pillow, but his eyes were watchful, distrusting.

Crane suddenly stopped laughing when he saw they were both regarding him strangely.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Aren't you glad? Can't you say something—thank you, or something? If it hadn't been for me you two would be in the hands of the police by now."

"And so would you," Ellis said quietly.

Crane flushed.

"I think I've had about enough of you," he said, an ugly look in his eyes. "You're always trying to stir up mischief. You'll go to-day. Safki can look after you, and then when you're well enough, you'll be free to do what you like. But you'll leave here to-day."

"Yes?" Ellis said, his eyes stony. "What about her?"

"Never mind her," Crane said. "She stays with me."

"Oh, no, she doesn't," Ellis returned. "We came together, we leave together."

Crane realized that he had let his mask slip and, with an obvious effort, controlled himself. Turning to Grace with his familiar kind, humorous expression he could switch on so easily, he said, "I'm sorry I lost my temper, my dear, but I've been through a pretty tough session with the old boy. Did you understand what Ellis said? He wants you to go with him. You're a free agent, you know. Do you want to go with him?"

Grace shivered; shook her head.

"All the same, she is coming with me," Ellis said quietly. "You can find some other girl to amuse you. Look at her. She's not much, is she? You can do better than that."

"You dry up," Crane snapped, moved to Grace and took her hand. "I don't want anyone but you. You know that, don't you? We can be very happy together if you'll stay."

Grace caught her breath. "Please don't let's listen to him. Can't we leave him? I know he'll ruin everything if we let him go on and on," she said with a sob.

"That rather settles it, doesn't it?" Crane said, and unseen by Grace, he grinned jeeringly at Ellis.

"If she knew the truth she wouldn't want to stay," Ellis said. His complete control over himself puzzled Crane. "Suppose you tell her what kind of a swine you really are. Then let her decide."

Crane laughed uneasily. "Oh, come, there's no need to call me names," he said. "But she can decide between us if that'll make

you happy." He looked down at Grace. "You understood what he called me just now? Well, I want you to know the kind of man he is. He's a traitor. He's Cushman—Edwin Cushman, Lord Haw-Haw the second: the chap who broadcasted from Germany. Didn't you ever hear him on the wireless?"

Grace shrank back. "I don't care who he is. He—he doesn't interest me. I just don't want to stay in this room any longer listening to his mischief."

"But you must care," Crane said gently. "The police want him, and if they find him, they'll hang him. You'll have something to tell your grandchildren (if you ever have any grandchildren). Why, he's a famous criminal."

"Please, Richard," Grace said, wringing her hands. "Please don't let us talk about him. . . ."

"All right, we won't," Crane said, shrugging. "He is rather a tawdry subject for discussion, isn't he? But I thought you should know the kind of man he is."

Ellis snarled at them. "Never mind about me. Tell her about yourself. I'd rather be what I am than you."

"Ellis is trying to make out that I murder women for the fun of it," Crane said, watching Grace closely. "He's sure I'm cracked, and once I get rid of him, I'll murder you. He believes I lured Julie down here and killed her. Nothing will convince him she was my sister and the poor darling killed herself. That's the issue, my dear." He stepped back, pointed dramatically at Ellis. "He or I. Choose between us: Cushman the traitor or Crane the murderer."

"Well, you've heard him," Ellis said to Grace. "Choose, but choose carefully. Ask yourself why he has sheltered us and if he could possibly love you. Look at him. Look at his eyes. Do you think a man like that could love anyone but himself? Remember the policeman. That was cold-blooded murder. Ask yourself what happened to Julie Brewer. Think. This is your last chance. If you stay with him he'll . . ."

"Stop it!" Grace cried, turning away. "I won't listen to you." She ran to Crane, took his hand. "Please let's go away and leave him," she pleaded. "If you really want me, if you don't think I'll be a nuisance, I want to go with you."

"Of course I want you, my dear," Crane said and pressed her to him. Over her head, he grinned triumphantly at Ellis. "Incredible, isn't she? Of all the trusting little fools. Shall I see if I can persuade her to leave me—just for the fun of it?"

"You'd better, Crane," Ellis said softly. "You'll be sorry if you don't."

"Don't think I'm frightened of you," Crane said, suddenly scowling. "I'm doing this to please myself—to show you my power over her. I could talk her into anything."

"Don't be too sure," Ellis said.

Grace suddenly pulled away from Crane to study his face, as if she suspected they were talking about her.

He smiled down at her.

"I don't want to force you to stay, my dear," he said, holding her close to him. "Suppose what he said were true? Suppose I was a mental case. You do read about such people. The world is full of diseased minds. You don't know anything about me. I might be one of those harmless-looking monsters who attack women without warning. Suppose I went for you after Ellis has gone. Won't you be sorry you didn't listen to him then?"

"Please don't talk like that," Grace said, her hands on his arms as she looked pleadingly up at him. "I don't care what happens to me so long as I'm with you."

Crane frowned. "But that's not the point," he said a little sharply. "I'm asking you—do you believe what he says—that I'm a murderer?"

She turned away, cried out, "What have I to live for? I'm deaf, shut away from everything. No one wants me. You gave me kindness and happiness. If you kill me I wouldn't care, but if I went away from you what would become of me?"

Crane pulled her round, shook her impatiently.

"Can't you answer yes or no? Do you think I'd kill you?"

"If you want to kill me—well, do it," she cried. "If you don't love me, then I don't care what happens to me."

"Never mind whether I love you or not," Crane said suddenly shouting at her, his face red with anger. "That's not the point. Do you believe I killed Julie? Now, answer me!"

"I know you did," she cried, bursting into tears. "But it doesn't matter to me. I know you couldn't help it, Richard. I'm not frightened of you. Only please say you love me and you want me."

Crane stepped back as if she had hit him in the face. His colour turned a waxen white.

"You know?" he repeated stupidly.

"Oh, yes, I knew last night," she said, and tried to take his hands, but he shook her off. "When you came out of the darkness . . . I saw your eyes. I knew you weren't well . . . then I remembered how frightened you were when you saw me in that dress. I kept thinking last night, and I knew Ellis, wicked as he is, couldn't have invented such a story unless he knew something." She controlled her sobbing, went on: "It all fitted together. We being here, the policeman dying, her clothes, your fear: it could only mean one thing. But even then I didn't believe it so I went to the wood after you had gone to bed. I had to . . . I had to find out. I saw the two graves . . . then I knew. . . ."

Crane stood over her, speechless, his face ashen, his hands shaking.

"Please don't be upset," she went on, frantic that she had hurt him. "Perhaps she was cruel to you, but I won't be. I'll do anything for you. I love you. I have faith in you. We can go somewhere, start all over again. It'll be all right. I know it will be all right." She moved towards him, holding out her arms. "We can

fight this horrible thing together," she went on. It was a tremendous moment in her life. She felt uplifted, ecstatic. She saw herself saving him; reclaiming his poor mind; making him strong and healthy once more.

Crane suddenly slapped her face.

"You slut!" he screamed at her. "To talk to me like that. I'll teach you! How dare you pity me!"

"Crane!" Ellis said. "Don't be theatrical. Have a drink and pull yourself together."

Crane turned on him.

"I'll show you, too," he shouted, snatched up the bottle of whisky.

Grace, her left cheek burning, ran to him, gripped his wrist.

"Don't drink that, Richard," she begged. "It'll only make things worse. Come and lie down. I'll . . ."

"Get out, you slut!" Crane snarled, and pushed her violently so that she reeled against the bed. Ellis caught her wrist, but shudderingly, she pulled away, backed against the wall.

Crane's hand shook so badly the whisky splashed on to the carpet. He swallowed half the spirit in the tumbler and flung the tumbler into the fireplace: splinters of glass flew across the room.

He faced them, his hands clenching and unclenching.

"I'll kill you now!" he shouted. "You don't believe I'll do it, do you? But I will!" He rounded on Ellis, "and I'll rub your face in her blood, you stinking little traitor!"

"Please, Richard," Grace begged. "Let me hold you. I can make you well. I know I can if you'll only have faith in me."

Crane whipped his hand behind him, pulled out the long white-handled knife from the sheath concealed by his coat.

"Run!" he shouted at Grace. I'm going to kill you. Run and scream like Julie did. Go on your hands and knees, as she did. Beg for your miserable, dreary little life."

At the sight of the knife Grace caught her breath sharply, but she didn't flinch nor move.

Ellis sat up in bed, leaned forward, studied Crane with cold dispassionate eyes.

Crane glared back at them, suddenly puzzled. Neither of them seemed afraid of him. He hesitated, suddenly unsure of himself, aware, too, that he was feeling cold and a little faint.

"Run!" he shouted. "I'm going to cut you . . . make you bleed . . ."

"Please put it down, Richard," Grace said quietly. "I'm not frightened. If we can get through this, it'll be all right."

Crane snarled at her, raised the knife, hesitated, lowered it again. Was he going to faint? God! he felt awful. There seemed no air in the room. He took a staggering step to the window, but it suddenly seemed too far away to reach. The strength in his fingers drained away. The knife was unbearably heavy and when Grace took it from him, he let her, relieved to be rid of it. He slumped into a chair, his legs no longer strong enough to support him.

"What's the matter with me?" he muttered thickly, passed his fingers across his face.

Ellis leaned forward. "You're poisoned, you fool!" he said. "You've taken enough poison to kill an army."

Even as Crane heard the taunting voice a red-hot iron seemed to stab him in the stomach. He screamed out, tottered to his feet.

"Poisoned?" he cried, reached out, grabbed hold of the mantelpiece to support himself.

"You said I was a fox, Crane," Ellis said, throwing back the bedclothes and swinging his legs to the floor. From under the bed he produced a pair of crutches, pulled himself upright. "Safki came to see me when you and Grace were in the wood. He brought these crutches and the poison. I put it in the whisky." His voice rose. "You're finished, you swine! I've won!"

"No!" Crane screamed. "I don't want to die. I want to live. Help me! Grace! Save me. Get a doctor! Don't let me die!"

Grace ran to him, caught him as he fell, but his weight dragged her with him to the floor.

"I don't want to die!" he raved, while she pillowed his head against her breasts. "I'm afraid to die. Do something for God's sake! Get a doctor!" He gripped Grace so tightly as he writhed in his agony that she cried out.

Ellis hobbled over to them.

"You said you didn't care when you died, you boasting cur," he said. "You've talked yourself into this. I was determined you wouldn't touch her."

"Help him!" Grace cried wildly. "You can't let him suffer like this. Please get help . . . get Safki. . . ."

Crane suddenly stiffened. A dry gasping sound came from his throat.

"He's finished," Ellis said, contemptuously.

Grace felt a shudder run through the great body. She could no longer support him, and he rolled away from her.

"Leave him," Ellis said. "Come on. We've got to get out of here before anyone comes."

But she paid no attention. Sobbing wildly, she turned to Crane, looked down at his blue, puffy face, into his fixed, sightless eyes.

"Come on," Ellis said. "You don't want to be caught, do you?"

She turned on him, hate blazing through her tears.

"You're not going to get away," she cried. "He wouldn't have hurt me. I could have saved him. I knew all along you'd spoil our happiness, but you'll pay for it. I'll see you don't get away."

"Leave him and stop talking rot," Ellis said, balancing himself with difficulty on the crutches. "It's over. We came together; we leave together."

"I'll get the police," she sobbed, sprang to her feet and darted to the door.

He grabbed at her, but she gave him a quick push and he overbalanced, sprawled heavily on the floor. Pain, like the steel teeth of

a trap, bit into his leg. Before he could move, she snatched up his crutches and threw them out of the window.

"You and your love," she cried. "Do you think I ever believed you loved me? You wanted to hurt me. You've always wanted to hurt me. Well, it's my turn now."

She ran from the room, stumbled blindly into the hall, seized the telephone. As she lifted the receiver she looked up, stiffened, the receiver slipped from her fingers.

Inspector James was standing in the hall. There was mud on his trousers and boots and his face was stern.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm here."

She waved her hand to the bedroom. There was a singing in her ears and the hall seemed to her to be darkening.

"It's Cushman," she said haltingly. "Don't let him get away. Cushman . . . the traitor."

She felt herself falling, and her mind cried out for Crane.

Ellis heard James's voice and he lifted his lean shoulders in a gesture of resignation.

Well, anyway, he had saved her life; had beaten Crane. It was probably the only decent, unselfish act he had done in his life, and the stupid little fool hadn't realized it.

Let them come! He was sick of hiding, running away, being too frightened to speak. Grace was the only woman he had ever cared for, and life without her would be too lonely. He had lost her for good. The ironic thing was she'd have been happier if Crane had killed her.

He looked at the whisky bottle. Should he finish his life quickly? No! Let them spend some of the country's money on him. He'd give them a show; give them something to read about in the papers. The trial might last days. Anyway, there'd be many weeks yet before they hanged him: many weeks to think of Grace.

He lay back, stretched out his aching leg and waited for James to come in. For the first time in his life he felt at peace.

THE END

Two killers wanted her: one for protection— and one for prey...

The killer had slain a helpless man to hide the secret of his identity. And he was quite prepared to kill the girl if she tried to double-cross him. But he'd reckoned without that terrible accident—and he was totally unprepared for the insane murderer who made death a ritual with a silver-handled knife . . .

James Hadley Chase

that 'master of the art of deception' as the **New Statesman** described him, has created another nerve-tingling masterpiece of macabre suspense.

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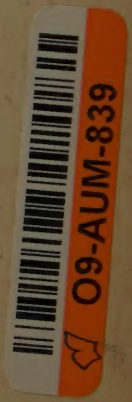

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